University of Alberta

Modern Buddhist Praxis and the Critique of Consumerism

by

Jeffrey Joseph Oss ©

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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Jeff Oss

#303, 11106 – 68 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T6H 2C2

Date: SEPTEMBER 26, 2001

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Modern Buddhist Praxis and the Critique of Consumerism* submitted by *Jeffrey Joseph Oss* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Raymond Morrow

Judith Golec
Dr. Judith Golec

Dr. P.A. Saram

Dr. Robert Hetherington

Dr. Jerrold Kachur

Dr. Lorne Dawson
University of Waterloo

Date: SEPTEMBER 25, 2001

Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with a sociological analysis of Western uses of Theravada Buddhism as a theory and practice that has implications for a social theory of consumption in regard to postmodernity. In particular, it seeks to situate the cultural location of Western Buddhist practice as an ethic of resistance to the socialization of the insatiable modern consumer, a socialization process that has rapidly become worldwide with the globalization of consumer culture. The Theravadin perspective provides a useful interpretive framework since it defamiliarizes consumer society. In order to identify the distinctive features of Theravada Buddhism, this Eastern moral worldview is juxtaposed with two moral worldviews rooted in the Western tradition: Kantian ethics and the Alcoholics Anonymous perspective that informs the Twelve Steps anti-addictions movement. A model of consumerism is then proposed, based on the Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha*), which incorporates key features of the sociological theories of Collin Campbell, Jean Baudrillard, and Thorstein Veblen that profile the insatiable consumer in terms of hedonism, nihilism, and social distinction. Following from this exposition is a detailed examination of modern Buddhist practice that is illustrated by excerpts from in-depth interviews from a sample of forty individuals at a Buddhist monastery and meditation centre in the United States. The data from this exploratory study are used to explore modern Buddhist praxis on two fronts: 1. To investigate whether central components of Buddhist

practice have in fact entered into the everyday lives of Western practitioners. 2. To gain an initial impression as to how Western Buddhist praxis runs counter to the socialization of the insatiable consumer. In this latter context, critical self-reflection is argued to be the most consequential feature of North American Buddhism as an ethos of resistance to consumerism; and, furthermore, that this aspect of Buddhist practice has a strong elective affinity with the ethos of the Western Enlightenment. While Westerners engaged in Buddhist meditation may appear foreign in North American society, the new religious movement they represent is not only consistent with the cultural heritage of modernity, it also legitimates the Enlightenment project in novel and distinct ways.

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Chapter One : Introduction

> Quit your childhood, my friend, and wake up.
> — Jean Jacques Rousseau

1.1 The Enlightenment Project & Postmodernism

In the above quotation Rousseau conveys the *ethos* of the Enlightenment, an eighteenth century intellectual movement that swept through Europe, heralding the birth of modernity (Spencer & Krauze, 2000; Outram, 1995; Kant, 1784/1983). *Ethos* means "that which motivates behavior or conduct" (Angeles, 1981: 85); it refers to a task that, for certain individuals, must be taken up; a task that one considers to be eminently worthwhile (Foucault, 1990) . The cultural task of the modern individual, to the extent that the modern individual is a child of the Enlightenment, is to emerge "from his self-imposed immaturity'" (Kant, 1983/1784: 41). The operative principle through which this task is to be accomplished is reason. More precisely, it is the capacity to use one's own reason without "guidance from another," as the German philosopher Immanual Kant made emphatic: "*Sapere Aude!* 'Have courage to use your own understanding!'—that is the motto of enlightenment." (Ibid). The modern valorization of reason is therefore rooted in the Enlightenment ethos. However, although the Enlightenment is known as the Age of Reason,

reason itself was cherished as the condition for human maturity. Whereas critical thinking is the hallmark of the Age of Reason, human maturity is the explicit aim of the Enlightenment project.

Does postmodernism signify the end of the Enlightenment project? The prefix 'post' in the term *post*modernity implies that, by the late twentieth century, modernity is finished in some sense. Two of the most salient aspects of the shift that has occurred are the emergence of the intellectual movement known as postmodernism and the ascendence of consumerism as the cultural locus of advanced western industrial societies (Lyon, 1994; Roseneau, 1992). To the extent that postmodernism voices the contemporary widespread 'rage against reason' (Bernstein, 1992), postmodernism signifies the abandonment of the Enlightenment project. In this respect, postmodernity signals the end of modernity since the Enlightenment project represents the cultural ethos of modernity. The rise of postmodernism coincides with the emergence of consumer society. What distinguishes modernity from postmodernity at the socio-economic level is a distinctive shift in emphasis from production to consumption (Galbraith, 1967; Baudrillard, 1998). While production was the most salient aspect of modern society, consumption is the most salient aspect of post-modern society. To make sense of the postmodern break with the Enlightenment ethos, the relationship between consumer society and what Georg Simmel[1] refers to as the "total development of the single individual" (1971: 234) must be addressed.

1.2 Simmel's Concept of Culture

Simmel's concept of culture offers some insight into the postmodern break with modernity. Culture, for Simmel (1971), has two distinct aspects: the objective and the subjective. *Objective culture* consists of the great works of artistic, moral, scientific, and economic production that "lead the psyche to its own fulfilment or indicates the path to be traversed by individuals or collectivities on the way to a heightened existence"; whereas *subjective culture* refers to "the measure of development of persons thus attained" (Ibid: 223). Although Simmel stresses that the objective and subjective aspects of culture are complementary, he attributes greater significance to subjective culture. "However great a masterpiece a cultivating object may be judged within its domain, from a 'cultural perspective' it must ultimately be judged from the point of view of its importance for the total development of the single individual" (Ibid: 231). Subjective culture's driving force is the "mysterious unity" toward which it is directed: the individual strives toward "spiritual wholeness," according to Simmel, so that the aim of subjective culture is the "development of our inner totality" (Ibid). Although objective culture is the condition for subjective culture, "subjective culture is the overarching goal. Its measure is the extent to which the psychic life-process makes use of those objective goods and accomplishments" (Ibid: 234). Obviously there can be no subjective culture without objective culture," asserts Simmel, since the development of the individual constitutes subjective culture "only through its incorporation of the cultivated objects which it encounters" (Ibid).

Simmel claims objective culture has developed independently in modern society. The development of modern society has witnessed a steadily increasing separation between "objective cultural production and the cultural level of the individual" (Ibid). Furthermore, while objects are becoming more and more cultivated, people are becoming less *able* to utilize this perfection of objective culture for the perfection of their subjective life. The result is a 'tragedy of culture' in which modern individuals encounter an overabundance of objective culture while simultaneously experiencing an increasing impoverishment of their inner life. The overabundance of objective culture reaches a peak in the consumer society whose massive intensification since the 1970s is the locus of the postmodern condition. The postmodern break with the ethos of the Enlightenment is anticipated in Simmelian view of individual culture lagging behind material culture. Objects are highly cultivated in consumer society, whereas the cultivation of individuals is largely neglected. As such, the postmodern condition of the individual in consumer society articulates the intensification of the crisis of subjective culture Simmel identified a hundred years ago. Whereas the cultivation of objects has become extremely refined, the cultivation of individuals has not, and, in fact, "has even frequently declined" (Ibid: 448). For example, while the invention of the telephone opened new *possibilities* for human communication, it cannot be considered to have advanced the individual's *capacity* for human communication. Human progress has not kept pace with material progress.

Wherever subjective culture manifests in postmodern society, the sociological investigation of such social phenomena can no doubt benefit from Simmel's conceptual framework. Simmel's concept of culture provides a particularly useful theoretical orientation for investigating new religious movements that emphasize the cultivation of the individual. The growing number of North Americans who are engaged in Buddhist meditation is a case in point.

1.3 Buddhism & Modernity

In January of 1997, one cold winter weekend in Boston, about eight hundred people attended a two-day conference entitled *Buddhism in America*. The organizer of the event envisioned it as a forum at which "modern-day meditation teachers could present, and attendees could experience, the essence of the Buddhist teachings" (Rappaport, 1997: xiv). What 'essence of the teachings' refers to in this case is not Buddhist doctrine nor Buddhist practice, per se, but to the harmonization of doctrine and practice which will be referred to in this study as Buddhist *praxis*. In other words, Buddhist *praxis* refers to the harmonization of objective and subjective culture. Buddhist scholarship may be completely removed from Buddhist practice, and is in fact consciously pursued as such by 'scholar monks' in Thailand who maintain that enlightenment is not possible under modern conditions (Sumedho, 1991; Chah, 1992a).

Conversely, Buddhist 'practice' consists of many different practices, any one of which can be appropriated for purposes other than that for which they were intended in Buddhist doctrine. For example, not eating after the noon meal can be taken up as a weight-loss regimen which is not the purpose of this Theravada Buddhist practice. Similarly meditating for the benefit of one's health as, for example, to lower blood pressure, to relax, and so forth, is not the aim of Buddhist meditation practice, although meditation is in fact prescribed for therapeutic purposes (Shapiro, 1994; Roth, 1997; Anderson et al., 1999). Only when Buddhist practice involves the cultivation of the individual does it constitute Buddhist *praxis*.

How western practitioners can live the Buddhist way in their everyday life, that is, modern Buddhist *praxis*, was the central concern at the conference. The phrase 'modern Buddhist *praxis*' will be used here to refer to Westerners engaged in Buddhist *praxis*. Because Buddhist *praxis* emphasizes the use of reason in the cultivation of the individual, it is therefore more appropriately described as 'modern' rather than 'postmodern'. While the Buddhism in America conference is clearly an expression of a strong interest in subjective culture, the fact that eight hundred people had gathered in Boston specifically to dwell on the difficulty of modern Buddhist *praxis* also exemplifies Simmel's concept of objective culture. The rapid spread of Buddhist meditation in the west is an 'historically unique' phenomenon, as proclaimed by the conference organizer in his introductory oration.

> It took 2,500 years for the Buddhist teachings to come to the West, but today, with the advent of modern communications techniques...Buddhist meditation methods are being rapidly disseminated throughout the Western world. This has created a historically unique situation in that techniques from many different countries are now readily available to the modern seeker. (Rappaport, 1997: xiv).

Furthermore, the appearance of the three major schools of Buddhism at the same historical moment all over the West is also unprecedented (Tworkov, 1997). For example, ten years ago the writer was at a Zen temple in rural Massachusetts in the company of three monks: a Sri Lankan monk from the Theravada tradition, a Japanese monk from the Zen tradition, and an American monk of the Tibetan tradition. "Where in Asia," one monk commented, "could you find three monks like this talking in the same room together?"

1.4 Modern Buddhist Praxis

What relation does the Boston conference have to consumer society? In the past decade, Buddhism has become popular in North America (Moore, 1997; Morreale, 1999). It can be thought that popular Buddhism represents New Age consumerism, whereas modern Buddhist *praxis* does not; that is, that popular Buddhism is little more than the latest thrill among 'spiritual consumers' shopping around in the New Age 'spiritual supermarket'. Therefore the current popularity of Buddhism in the United States[2] must not be conflated with 'serious' Western interest in Buddhist *praxis*. According to the above view, popular Buddhism has no relationship to the *Buddhism in America* conference. The modern practitioners at the conference do not represent New Age consumers feeding on market-place Buddhism.

However, if the 'modern seekers' at the conference are not 'spiritual consumers', then what are they seeking on the path of Buddhist *praxis*? Can we assume that these North Americans are in fact actually engaged in Buddhist *praxis*? The availability of excellent English translations of

Buddhist scriptures, well organized meditation retreats, and elegant meditation centers in beautiful rural settings across North America represent the emergence of an objective culture that does *not* necessarily indicate a development of the subjective culture of these North Americans. Nevertheless, it is a condition of possibility for such a development, as Simmel (1971) asserts: "Obviously there can be no subjective culture without objective culture," because the development of the total individual can only proceed as subjective culture "through its incorporation of the cultivated objects which it encounters " (Ibid: 234).

The focus in this thesis is the interface between consumerism and modern Buddhist praxis. To explore this relationship, the focus has been narrowed to Theravada Buddhism, one of the three main schools of Buddhism (see Appendix A). The principle source of Theravada doctrine is the *Tripitaka*, or *Pali Canon*, a vast collection of the Buddha's discourses preserved in the Pali language which is similar to the language spoken by the historical Buddha (Bodhi, 1994). Pali terms will therefore appear in the discussion of modern Buddhist *praxis* (see Glossary of Pali Terms). Since Theravada Buddhism is the focus in this dissertation, the term 'Buddhist practice' will henceforth be understood to mean *Theravada* Buddhist practice. 'Modern Buddhist *praxis*' therefore refers to the harmonization of Theravadin Buddhist doctrine and practice.

Modern Buddhist *praxis* was investigated in a three month exploratory study of a Theravadin monastery and meditation center in the United States in the spring of 1998. Interviews with monastics and lay people at the center provided forty short life-history narratives. These life-histories comprise the data collected in the exploratory study that will be used in the dissertation[3]. The narratives will be used to illustrate the subjective culture of the participants' engagement with the objective culture of Theravada Buddhism. After sketching a brief overview of the course of their lives leading up to their encounter with Buddhist meditation, each participant was asked to describe that event in detail, and then relate whatever subsequent developments of personal significance took place following the encounter. The narratives indicate how modern individuals engage in Buddhist *praxis* in their daily lives, that is, the relation between Theravadin doctrine and their actual practice. The next question then is how their engagement relates to consumer culture. In order to address this larger question it is necessary to specify what Buddhist *praxis* refers to and also what consumerism refers to.

A definition of consumption was formulated using the language of the Theravadin worldview to facilitate the comparison between Buddhist *praxis* and consumerism. A threefold definition of market consumption was constructed using the Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha*) to synthesize three sociological theories of consumerism: those of Thorstein Veblen[4] (1979), Jean Baudrillard[5] (1996 [1968]; 1998), and Colin Campbell[6] (1987). The concept of market consumption constructed from this threefold theoretical synthesis makes it possible to determine how modern Buddhist *praxis* differs from market consumption as therein defined and to identify the ways in which Buddhist *praxis* runs counter to consumerism.

From the Simmelian perspective, Buddhist *praxis*, that is, the application of Buddhist doctrine in everyday life, consists of two components: the subjective and objective. Each of these requires a separate method of investigation. The lifeworld, or subjective, component was investigated through the life-history narratives, as discussed above. Buddhist doctrine, the objective component, was investigated through researching the Theravada literature, primarily the authoritative meditation teachings of the Theravadin monk Achan Chah[7] (1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1996) but also the work of other prominent monks and lay meditation teachers in the Theravada Buddhist tradition (Goldstein, 1983; Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987; Gunaratana, 1992; Nanasampano; 1995a, 1995b, 1997). The intersection between practice and doctrine will be illustrated through lifeworld examples drawn from the interview transcripts in order to situate the interface between modern Buddhist *praxis* and consumerism.

1.5 The Critique of Consumerism

Investigating the relationship between modern Buddhist praxis and consumerism does not proceed from the assumption that consumerism is well understood whereas Buddhist *praxis* is what needs clarification. On the contrary, this study presumes that both elements are equally unclear. The simultaneous clarification of both elements is the *raison d'etre* for a theoretically synthesized definition of market consumption with which to approach the postmodern phenomenon of westerners engaged in Buddhist *praxis*. Contrasting market consumption with modern Buddhist *praxis* is intended to illuminate what consumerism refers to as a transparent 'way of being' in the modern world (Baudrillard, 1996 [1968]). The transparency of consumerism camouflages how it actually operates in the lifeworld; it is against the "illusion of transparency to which all members of society are spontaneously inclined," as Wacquant (1992: 8) puts it, that the contrast between Buddhist *praxis* and consumption may prove to be theoretically worthwhile.

> [Beyond their differences] Marx, Durkheim, and Weber converge in their theories of sociological knowledge. In particular, they all agree on the 'principle of non-consciousness' which posits, against the 'illusion of transparency' to which all members of society are spontaneously inclined, that social life is explained by causes irreducible to individual ideas and intentions. (Ibid)

Presumably then relations of consumption remain largely invisible not because they are hidden but because they are transparent: consumerism is difficult to critique because it is so obvious that it eludes us. Consequently a cultural critique of consumerism is not possible without sufficient distance from the blur of that which is too close at hand to allow us to bring it into focus. The investigation of Buddhist *praxis* is aimed to provide a corrective lens through which the transparency of consumerism will come into sharp focus. To the extent that the Buddhist perspective defamiliarizes consumerism, Buddhist *praxis* has a strategic relationship to market consumption in so far as it opens a space for cultural critique.

It is important to note that Simmel does not propose a dualistic view of culture in which the subjective is opposed to the objective. The aim of objective culture is the cultivation of the individual; at the same time, the cultivation of the individual cannot occur without objective culture. The interdependence of these two aspects of culture is expressed in Aristotle's concept of the harmonization of *theoria* and *praxis* (see Chapter Four). The issue of identity in consumer society is closely linked to *praxis*. To the extent that identity confusion is a prominent feature of postmodernism (Rosenau, 1992), the distinction between the subject as self-created and the subject as an effect of power relations (Foucault, 1983b, 1988b) helps to situate the concept of *praxis* within the broader categories of subjective and objective culture. Subjective culture can be understood as the cultivation of an individual's freely chosen identity. In contrast, subjectivity can also be externally imposed upon the individual. Socialization determines an individual's subjectivity through external forces whereas *praxis* refers to voluntary activities undertaken by the individual through which he fashions himself as a subject. Foucault referred to these latter activities as "technologies of the self " (1988b: 18). *Praxis* then refers to 'technologies of the self' as a voluntary process whereby an individual creates his own identity. In contrast, externally imposed identities may subjugate individuals, as, for example, in negative gender or racial stereotypes that tie an individual to his or her identity. The cultivation of the subject involves freely chosen identities that the individual aspires to through various "technologies of the self".

> Technologies of the self permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Ibid).

The subject of praxis is the antithesis of the subject of social engineering. Whereas the postmodern individual has been socially engineered to incessantly consume, modern Buddhist *praxis* involves technologies of the self that run counter to the individual's socialization as an insatiable consumer. The insatiable consumer represents a form of subjectivity that has been intensively inculcated in the postmodern individual since the postwar period (Galbraith, 1967; Baudrillard; 1998). The term 'insatiable consumer' refers to a socially-engineered 'system of needs' that is the logical extension of the system of production (Baudrillard, 1998). According to Galbraith, the 'New Industrial State' which emerged in the West at the end of the Second World War, had reached such a high productive capacity that, in order to maintain that capacity, it became imperative that consumer demand be put under rational control. It was no longer left to the consumer to decide how much or what to buy, but rather the decision was to be made by the 'captains of industry' themselves (Baudrillard, 1998). Consequently, billions of dollars are spent annually on advertising & marketing (Jhally, 1998a) for the social engineering of a system of artificial needs that corresponds to the system of production[8]. This socialized 'system of needs' operates independently of the individual's will or consciousness, that is, whether the postmodern individual wishes it or not.

Modern Buddhist praxis confronts the individual's socialization as an insatiable consumer in terms of a confrontation between a subjectivity that is freely chosen and one that has been externally imposed. The critical factor in Buddhist praxis is to become conscious of one's unconscious habits. In this case, to become conscious of one's conditioning as a system of artificial needs that corresponds to the system of production.

1.6 Overview of the Thesis

The critique of consumerism proceeds from the Theravadin perspective. As objective culture, Theravada Buddhism represents a moral worldview that has only recently appeared as a 'cultivating object' in the west. To identify its distinctive features, Theravada Buddhism will be compared and contrasted with two ethical perspectives from the western tradition: Kantian ethics and the Twelve Step Program. This juxtaposition of different ethical orientations will be taken up in Chapter Two, which focuses on the relation between moral action and the subject in terms of the different ways in which desire is framed within each worldview. After the distinctiveness of the Theravadin perspective has been specified in Chapter Two, the Theravadin concept of desire will be examined in detail in Chapter Three in relation to three theories of consumerism. The Theravadin concept of desire (*tanha*) is used to synthesize the sociological theories of Colin Campbell, Jean Baudrillard, and Thorstein Veblen. The *tanha* model of market consumption provides criteria for identifying the ways in which Buddhist *praxis* runs counter to consumerism in terms of hedonism, nihilism, and social distinction. The formulation of the *tanha* model sets the stage for exploring the relationship between consumerism and modern Buddhist *praxis*. Since the model suggests how consumerism can be perceived within the framework of Buddhist *theoria*, it is then possible to chart the defining features of modern Buddhist *praxis* in relation to the socialization of the insatiable consumer. Chapter Four considers the concept of praxis itself, first by examining how *praxis* is used in the social philosophy of Karl Marx[9], and then by examining Aristotle's twin concepts of *praxis* and *theoria* which underlie Friedrich Nietzsche's[10] criticism of modern philosophy. Buddhist *praxis* is then outlined from the perspective of Buddhst *theoria*, that is, Buddhist *praxis* as objective culture. What remains then to be examined is Buddhist *praxis* as subjective culture, that is, *modern* Buddhist *praxis*, which is taken up in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

The interview data is used at this point to investigate the three basic components of Buddhist *praxis* and to illustrate various ways in which Buddhist *praxis* runs counter to the central features of the insatiable consumer identified in the *tanha* model. The explication of modern Buddhist *praxis* proceeds through a selective reading of the interview data. Generally, the selected excerpts from the life histories were those narratives that most vividly conveyed particular points of contrast between the conditioning of the insatiable consumer and the subjective culture of modern Buddhist *praxis*[11]. A detailed examination of the three components of modern Buddhist *praxis* constitutes the remainder of the thesis. These three components are self-restraint (Chapter Five), calm (Chapter Six), and self-critique (Chapter Seven); each is considered in reference to consumerism as formulated in the *tanha* model in so far as it runs counter to the socialization of the insatiable consumer. Self-restraint contrasts with the insatiable consumer's conditioned impulsivity; concentrating and calming the mind contrasts with the distracted and agitated imagination-oriented consumer mind; self-critique (or critical self-reflection) contrasts with the perpetual dissatisfaction with oneself and the obsession with self-image. While postmodern individuals are not socialized solely by the intensive conditioning process that generates the insatiable consumer, consumerism is without doubt the most prominent feature of postmodernity (Lyon, 1994). Finally, the concluding chapter points out that in terms of cultural significance of North Americans engaged in modern Buddhist *praxis,* the most striking feature in the contrast between consumerism and modern Buddhist *praxis* is that the critical self-reflection intrinsic to Buddhist *praxis* is notably absent in the insatiable consumer. This contrast suggests that the insatiable consumer signifies a cultural break between postmodernity and the ethos of the Enlightenment, whereas modern Buddhist *praxis* represents a cultural continuity.

Chapter Two: Moral Action and the Subject

A Perspectival Approach to the Insatiable Consumer

If postmodernity means anything,
it means the consumer society.
- David Lyon, 1994: 68

2.1 From Commodity Production to Consumer Production

Capital, Karl Marx's monumental critique of the capitalist system of production, begins with an analysis of the commodity. The first paragraph of *Capital*, which follows, is a frequently cited passage in contemporary discussions of consumer society.

> The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities,' its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity (Marx, 1954: 35)

The 'immense accumulation of commodities' does not, by the very fact of its existence, generate a market for those commodities. Modern individuals have *to learn* to be consumers (Baudrillard, 1998). However, the conditioning of the modern consumer is not a concern in *Capital* because, although Marx begins with the commodity in his critique of industrial society, his focus is on the system of production[12]. A century after *Capital* first appeared, it is now the system of consumption that commands attention since the "production of consumers seems at least as important for economic growth as the production of goods and services" (Ashely & Orenstein, 2000: 474). Consequently it is not the commodity but the socialization of the consumer that is the appropriate starting point for a critique of consumer society, that is, for a critique of the postmodern system of production.

The case for the existence of postmodernism, according to Fredric Jameson, "depends on the hypothesis of some radical break...generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s" (1991: 1). While it is debatable whether a decisive break with modernity has in fact occurred in the century since *Capital* was published in 1867 (Lyon, 1994), two transformations have taken place in western industrial society. First, a powerful new agent of socialization emerged in the industrialized world since Marx's death in 1883: the electronic mass media. Since consumers are socialized primarily through the mass media, Marx could not have foreseen this technological disjuncture that distinguishes postmodernity from modernity. Television especially demonstrates how the "postmodern splits away from the modern when the production of demand — of consumers — becomes central" (Ibid: 57) since television is explicitly geared to "the production of needs and wants, the mobilization of desire and fantasy" (Harvey, 1990: 61) through which citizens are socialized to become consumers[13]. Second, and more significant than the rise of the mass media, is the rise of the 'new industrial state' that emerged in the west in the postwar period in which control of consumer demand became an explicit concern for the 'captains of industry' (Galbraith, 1967). The rationally calculated socialization of consumers mandated by the captains of industry in the new industrial state is referred to in this thesis as *market consumption*. The term, 'consumption' will henceforth be understood to mean market consumption, the locus of post-industrial consumer society.

> Advanced capitalist societies today can no longer be described primarily as *industrial* societies...the production of consumers seems at least as important for economic growth as the production of goods and services...In the last decade or so the leisure and entertainment sectors of the economy and not the manufacturing sector have been the most profitable (Ashley & Orenstein, 2000: 474).

Although the rationally calculated socialization of individuals as consumer began in the post-war period, the intensification of market consumption escalated dramatically since the 1970s (Jacobson & Mazur, 1995). For example, a hundred billion dollars was spent on advertising in 1997 alone to socialize American citizens to become consumers (Jhally, 1998a). Therefore the central feature of post-industrial society, that is, of postmodernity, is a consumer culture in which "consumerism seems to be an end in itself. Capitalists now develop new and highly developed markets by selling consumers new needs, new experiences, and new forms of meaning, all of which are defined by the marketplace" (Ibid).

A key focus of sociological interest in market consumption is what Colin Campbell (1987) refers to as the *insatiable consumer*. Campbell identifies insatiability as the mystery of modern consumption, "an apparently endless pursuit of wants; the most characteristic feature of modern consumption being this insatiability" (1987: 37). The insatiable consumer signifies a radical postmodern departure from the ideal of modern individualism. Whereas modernism encourages "self-mastery and self control," post-modernism encourages "hedonism and self-indulgence" (Ashley & Orenstein, 2000: 476). Therefore the postmodern individual cannot be thought of as an individual in the modern sense of the inwardly strong autonomous individual valorized by Enlightenment thinkers. The insatiable consumer not only signifies the anti-thesis of modern individualism, it also signifies a postmodern break with another central tenet of the European Enlightenment: the belief that it is possible for the individual to achieve a coherent and rational worldview. The postmodern subject is "besieged by an endless jumble of messages, codes, and ideas, most of which are incompatible, inconsistent, and quite infantile. Many people respond to the current cacophony of mostly commercial messages that bombard them daily by abandoning all hope that they ever could attain some kind of rational understanding of the world" (Ibid). It is in this regard that the postmodern era has been described as psychotic, whereas the modern era was neurotic, and that reality has been 'murdered' (Baudrillard, 1995).

To summarize, the discussion of consumerism in this study refers to the market consumption. More specifically, its focus is the intensification of market consumption since the 1970s that accompanied postmodernism. The object of interest in this regard is the insatiable consumer. The concern in this critique of consumption is with the preservation of the autonomy of the individual in postmodern society, a concern expressed earlier by sociologists Max Weber and Georg Simmel (Kendell, et al., 2000; Turner, 1992).

2.2 A Perspectival Approach to Market Consumption

The critique of consumption presents a methodological problem since the issue of consumerism tends to elicit a moral response, either to attack or to defend it. While it is important to avoid moralization as a methodological pitfall, the ethical dimension involved in market consumption must nonetheless be addressed. To achieve this goal, Nietzsche's perspectival approach[14] will be used to construct three distinct perceptions of the insatiable consumer from the moral worldviews of Kantian ethics, Theravada Buddhism, and the Twelve Step perspective. To approach it objectively, consumerism will be presumed to be an amoral social phenomenon. 'Objectively' here must be understood in the Nietzschean sense of that term in which objectivity is "understood not as 'contemplation without interest' (which is a nonsensical absurdity) but as the ability *to control* one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge" (Nietzsche, 1969: 119).

Nietzsche's perspectival approach offers a means by which to view consumerism from various moral perspectives. Consumerism and the insatiable consumer would appear differently through the lens of each of the above moral worldviews. However, since it is the *insatiability* of the modern consumer that is at issue here, that is 'the endless pursuit of wants', the locus of our investigation is desire. Therefore, the perception of consumerism as an ethical issue will be investigated through each perspective's perception of desire. Although the way desire is understood is distinct in each case, desire is central to the way the insatiable consumer would be construed in each of these perspectives. The Twelve Step program frames desire as a battle between infantile egotism and surrender to an external moral agency; Theravada Buddhism valorizes individual enlightenment as the complete understanding of desire; Kantian ethics dichotomizes desire as the anti-thesis of moral agency (Kurtz, 1980;

Maxwell, 1984; Sumedho, 1992; Kant, 1998). We now turn to a more detailed consideration of these three moral worldviews, beginning with the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

2.2.1 Kant's Moral Philosophy

Kant's moral philosophy became the banner of the early Romantic movement's refutation of the Enlightenment project. Although Romanticism opposed the Enlightenment, it carried on the heritage of the Enlightenment in emphasizing Kant's radical individualism. However, the "Romantic view of individuality is entirely opposed to the Enlightenment's concept of individuality" (Saiedi, 1993: 111), because each is rooted in a different theory of the subject: utilitarianism on the one hand and Kant's moral philosophy on the other. Kantian ethics directly challenged the utilitarian ethics championed by the Enlightenment.

Utilitarianism The utilitarian theory of the subject was a central feature of Enlightenment thought: all human beings act 'by nature' according to a hedonistic calculus.

> The Enlightenment's rationalistic theory of action can be expressed in terms of its ultimate and universal law of action determination: All humans by nature like pleasure and dislike pain. Consequently human beings act to maximize their pleasure and minimize their pain. In other words, humans follow their interests, and therefore their action is determined by the principle of utility maximization. (Ibid: 30).

The Romantics revolted against this deterministic utilitarian view of human nature. Consequently, Kant's concept of the individual free will had a strong appeal for the early Romantic movement: The free individual will was 'free' precisely because it was *not* determined by self-interest. The freedom of the individual to act as a moral agent is founded instead on his capacity for rational action, that is, *practical reason* which is free of self-interested concerns about the consequences of that action, in accordance to a priori moral imperatives (Morrow, 1994). In short, free will, for Kant, denotes the exercise of practical reason.

The utilitarian view that morality is grounded in self-interest is based on the empiricist claim that all knowledge, including moral ideals, derive from experience; Kant's moral philosophy is a polemic explicitly directed against this claim (Korsgaard, 1998). Moral action is not determined by self-interest, according to Kant, but issues from the rational free will of the individual: a will that is 'free' from desire, inclination, habit; in short, free of all the motives of self-interest. Consequently the rationality in Kant's concept of the rational free will is distinct from that of a hedonistic calculus.

The rationality that inheres in the utilitarian theory of human action is *instrumental* reason, reason in the service of self-interest, in which action is a means to an end. In contrast, the rationality characterizing Kant's moral subject is *practical* reason, in which moral action is not a means to an end but is an end in itself[15] because "in the case of what is to be morally good it is not just to *conform* to moral law it must be done *for the sake of the law*" (Kant, 1998: 3). The key element in Kant's statement is 'the law': Kant claims there is a moral law that imposes on all rational beings the necessity to act in conformity to the moral law. Consequently Kant refers to this universal moral law as the *practical* law since it demands action. The necessity to act issues from a sense of duty where duty refers to the "practical unconditional necessity of action" (Ibid: 34). Importantly, this action from duty, according to Kant, is action free of inclinations, that is, of self-interest. Rather than being used in the service of self-interest then, reason is used in the service of performing one's duty as derived from a priori moral imperatives, which Kant refers to as the moral law. Universal law, duty, free will, and practical reason, all interweave in Kant's concept of the categorical imperative, to which we now turn.

Categorical Imperative In *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant sets forth his proposition that an a priori universal moral law exists, a practical law that is free of any inclinations and incentives, and that it is the duty of all rational beings to obey this law. It is in the

Groundwork that Kant established his foundational concept of the categorical imperative: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Ibid: 31). The 'maxim' is the subjective principle of the categorical imperative, pertaining to the unique conditions of the moral subject. The law is the objective principle that is valid for *all rational* beings. The moral agency of the rational free will is situated between one's maxim and the universal law. *If* you can act so as to will your action as a law binding on all rational beings, *then* your act is morally valid. Note that practical reason does not specify *what* an individual should or should not do but provides a formal procedure to ascertain the moral validity of any action. It is in this sense that Kantian ethics constitutes a *procedural ethics*.

> An action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination, and with it every object of the will, hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law. And so the 'maxim' of complying with such a law if it infringes upon all my inclinations. (Ibid: 13-14; original emphasis)

If the will is *determined* by 'the law,' how is it *free*? How can it be the basis of the individual's moral autonomy? Kant resolves this apparent contradiction by situating the law within the individual himself: the moral law is not externally imposed but self-imposed. Conforming to the a priori moral imperative (law) is to conform to one's own self-imposed law (maxim). Hence individual moral autonomy is synonymous with self-government.

Duty and morality derive not from experience, as the empiricists claim, but from a priori moral ideas such as that of the good. For example, how Jesus is portrayed in the Gospel "must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is cognized as such" (Ibid: 21). Therefore the ground of morality rests "only on pure [practical] reason independently of all experience" (Ibid). From this premise, it follows that duty derives from an a priori idea of the good, that is, from an ideal rather than from experience. Free will follows from the same premise since, for Kant, free will is synonymous with the *good* will[16]. Good will is explicitly distinguished from action based on self-interest. In contrast to the *instrumental* reason involved in pursuing desires and inclinations, Kant posits *practical* reason[17]. For Kant then, good will means doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Practical reasoning is linked to free will in so far as "the true vocation of reason must be to produce a will that is good, not perhaps as a *means* to other purposes, but good in itself, for which reason is absolutely necessary" (Ibid: 10). Whereas, in utilitarian ethical theory, human beings are determined by a hedonistic calculus, moral agency in Kantian ethics is predicated on the rational free will. The rational free will consists of two interrelated elements: the individual will free from desires and habits, and the exercise of pure practical reason. The law itself is the source of the good. To will the law as a universally binding moral imperative is therefore to exercise good will. If free will is none other than the good will, it is free because it is not directed to any end other than itself.

An important distinction involving the categorical imperative concerns what Kant calls the *autonomy* of the will, as opposed to *heteronomy*, or actions based on interest. Kant contrasts the necessity of an action motivated by *duty* to "the necessity of an action [motivated by] a certain *interest*. This might be one's own or another's interest" (Ibid: 41. Emphasis added). Significantly, self-interest is regarded as something *externally* imposed upon one's actions in contrast to the *internally* imposed self-legislation intrinsic to moral autonomy[18]. From this ethical perspective, the engine driving the insatiability of the modern consumer is not the individual's free will, but rather interests (whether of self or of others) external to the individual's moral autonomy. The rational free will is completely distinct from market consumption in that the hedonistic consumer is neither rational in terms of practical reason, nor free in the Kantian sense of moral autonomy. In contrast to Kant's radical individualism, the moral worldview of the Twelve Step Program apparently rejects modern individualism altogether. The individual's moral autonomy carries little weight in the Twelve Step Program, a perspective we will consider next.

2.2.2 The Twelve Step Perspective

The Twelve Step Program is the rehabilitation procedure at the core of Alcoholics Anonymous, a worldwide mutual-help movement[19] that originated in 1935 in the United States (AA World Services, 1967). This basic program was sketched out in *Alcoholics Anonymous,* a book published in 1939 intended to be a source of inspiration and guidance for others, and after which the AA movement took its name (Makela et al., 1996). Although in its structure, activities, and ideology, AA strongly resembles a religious movement, most members adamantly assert that AA is "spiritual, not religious" (Ibid: 10). It should therefore be regarded as a secular social movement. However, unlike most new social movements which are aimed to change society, AA is focused on self-transformation: it aims only to bring about personal change in its members, and "specifically renounces any ambition to change the surrounding society" (Ibid: 9). Since the recovery procedure through which alcoholics have reached sobriety through AA has been very successful, the Twelve Step program has been extended outside AA for similar problems such as drug addiction and eating disorders. For example, Narcotics Anonymous has its own modified version of the original Twelve Step program for heroin addicts.

Twelve Step programs are referred to as *fellowships* "because of the central role of affiliation with other recovering people" (DuPont & McGovern,1994: 1). Therefore, in contrast to Kantian ethics, the Twelve Step perspective emphasizes the importance of the group for the individual's recovery. Nonetheless, both Kantian ethics and the Twelve Step perspective represent secular moral worldviews; while anti-modern in its rejection of individualism, the Twelve Step perspective is modern in its "mistrust of religious claims, [a modern attitude] that matured in the Enlightenment" (Ibid).

Dr. Tiebout, a psychiatric analyst of A.A., identified four essential elements in the A.A. program: "hitting bottom, surrender, ego-reduction, maintenance of humility" (Kurtz, 1980: 183). In his careful analysis of the act of surrender involved in the A.A. program, Tiebout wrote, "the specific part of the personality which must surrender is the inflated ego...the carry-over of infantile traits into adult life...a feeling of omnipotence" (Ibid). The act of surrender that lies at the heart of the A.A. program is the surrender to a "power greater than ourselves" (Ibid: 175). Moral agency then resides outside of the individual. Salvation, construed as sobriety, depends on the recognition of ~~this and~~ on surrendering one's will to that power (Ibid). Bearing in mind these four essential elements in the program, let us now consider the steps themselves. DuPont and McGovern (1994) provide a useful breakdown of the twelve steps as follows.

> - Steps one to three involve acknowledging that it is hopeless to deal with the addiction on one's own, and that belief in a greater power than oneself is the foundation for abstinence. Moral agency, in short, is situated outside the individual and must be recognized as such.
>
> - Steps four to seven consist of admitting one's moral faults to God as well as to men (that is, taking one's 'moral inventory') and asking for help from the greater power.
>
> - In steps eight and nine, one makes amends to those one has hurt.
>
> -Step ten involves maintaining steps four to nine as a daily process of awareness, self-evaluation, and making amends.
>
> - Step eleven consists of prayer and meditation as a way to sustain a relationship with God.
>
> - The twelfth step is to continue the practice and extend it to the point of helping others to overcome their alcoholism (Ibid: 4-5).

At this point the Twelve Step perspective can be contrasted to that of Kantian ethics in terms of how each construes the individual, reason, and experience.

Individual Kantian ethics is predicated on the premise of a morally autonomous individual, whereas in the Twelve Step Program the egotistic individual is the moral problem and moral agency is situated outside the individual.

Reason There is a distrust of the individual's capacity to 'use his own reason' to solve his drinking problem in the Twelve Step perspective. The A.A. had become acutely aware of the danger of rationalization as their "ancient enemy" because it led only to drinking again, the ancient enemy of rationalization being described as "this odd trait of mind and emotion, this perverse wish to hide a bad motive underneath a good one" (Kurtz: 191). Dismissing rationality altogether on such grounds would not be valid within the framework of Kantian ethics. From the Kantian perspective, the Twelve Step program's distrust of human reason is misplaced since rationalization refers only to one type or rationality, that is, to reasoning based on self interest, which is the anti-thesis of Kant's notion of practical reason.

What role then has reason in the Twelve Step perspective? AA's anti-individualism is matched by its deep anti-intellectualism. In contrast to Kantian ethics, experience rather than reason is what is central.

> A.A. experience taught that if sufferers from alcoholism not cured by 'experts' were to have any chance at 'getting the program' the fellowship had to proclaim the simple truth learned from its experience: sobriety came through witness not by reasoning (Ibid: 192).

In contrast to the practical reason of Kantian ethics, the Twelve Step program involves what may be called an existential rationality: awareness of one's actions in concrete human relationships. Whereas moral action has its locus outside experience in Kantian ethics, experience is fundamental to the ethics of the Twelve Step program.

Experience Accordingly the A.A. emphasizes experience rather than reason. The centrality of surrendering one's will is key to this emphasis. Surrender must be *experienced* and not merely understood intellectually. One must 'bear witness' to the abdication of one's will 'one day at a time' in the struggle through which one reaches sobriety. The *experience* of being alcoholic is regarded as the basis of the AA self-help fellowship on the understanding that "only an alcoholic can understand/help another alcoholic" (Kurtz, 1980: 191). From the A.A. perspective, it is not rationality that will solve the alcoholic's problem but *witnessing*: telling one's story. "Witnessing is a central activity in AA and in other 12 Step movements" (Makela, 1994: 164; see also Rappaport, 1993)[20]. The practice of telling one's story is a cognitive device through which 12 Step program members reinterpret their alcoholic past and construct new identities as sober ex-alcoholics (Makela, 1994). Witnessing is central to the Twelve Step process of self-transformation.

In summary, the goal of the Twelve Step program is self-transformation, not self-legislation. AA promised the alcoholic sobriety as a 'salvation' from addiction (Kurtz, 1980), and recognizing the need for salvation from addiction became the program's first step. The transformation of the 'alcoholic' self is the aim of the Twelve Step program. Desire, as interpreted within the framework of salvation from addiction, is represented as a battle of wills: the struggle between egotistic wilfulness and its surrender to a higher power. In this secularized version of the Christian moral principle 'not my will but Thy will be done,' the quest for salvation (sobriety) is a group effort. It is the group, the fellowship of sufferers, and not the lone individual that is the vehicle for salvation. Theravada Buddhism, the third moral worldview, to which we now turn, reflects certain aspects of both Kantian ethics and the Twelve Step perspective.

2.2.3 Theravada Buddhism

Unlike Kantian ethics and the Twelve Steps program, Theravada Buddhism represents a religious rather than a secular moral perspective. More significantly, it represents an Eastern perspective whose distinctive features become more apparent when the Theravadin orientation is contrasted with the other two worldviews in terms of how it construes the individual, experience, and reason.

Individual Similar to Kantian ethics, Buddhism situates the locus of moral action in the individual (Chah, 1992a, 1994, 1996; Nanasampano, 1995; 1997). Unlike Kant, Buddhism emphasizes the vital importance of a concrete moral community (*sangha*) as a necessary condition for the individual's moral development (Goldstein, 1983; Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987). In this regard, Theravada Buddhism is similar to the Twelve Step program. They are dissimilar, however, in regard to the self. Although self-understanding is as important in the Theravada as it is in the Twelve Steps, Theravadin Buddhism involves perceiving the insubstantiality of the self whereas the Twelve Step program involves the solidification of selfhood through witnessing. Buddhist individualism lies outside the framework of both modern ethical perspectives since moral agency is not located outside the individual as it is in the Twelve Step program, nor is it situated in an ahistorical moral subject as it is in Kantian ethics.

Experience The premise of Kantian ethics is that universal moral law cannot be directly apprehended (Korsgaard, 1998): hence ethical action is based instead on an *idea*, the idea of universal moral law (the categorical imperative). The categorical imperative thus constitutes an *intellectual*, that is, a *conceptual* understanding. In contrast, Buddhist ethics is not based on abstract reason but on one's actual experience, more specifically, on direct observation of the lifeworld[21]. In Buddhism, as in the Twelve Step perspective, intellectual understanding has no major significance. Much more significant is direct *perception* of the cause of human suffering. Reason operates in conjunction with empirical observation as *mindful self-investigation,* the aim being an existential understanding of human suffering.

Similar to the Twelve Step program, in which the addict's suffering (that is, experience) is the foundation, the basis of Buddhist *praxis* is also human suffering. However, in Buddhism suffering is deemed to be a defining characteristic of all existence, not evidence of the character flaw of an egotistic individual. The Buddha expounded this theme in his first public discourse, which is the core of his teachings known as the Four Noble Truths (Sumedho, 1992b). These Truths are as follows:

1 - The existence of suffering (*dukkha)*
2 - The cause of suffering
3 - The end of suffering
4 - The way leading to the end of suffering

Unlike Kantian ethics in which the moral law cannot be apprehended, in Theravada Buddhism the premise is that the cause of human suffering (*dukkha*) can be directly perceived and it is through this direct insight that freedom from suffering obtains (Chah, 1992b; Nanasampano; 1995, 1997). Ethical action is based on *direct perception,* or insight, which is the aim of Buddhist *praxis.* Accordingly Theravada meditation practice is called 'insight meditation'.

Reason Observation of one's immediate existential circumstances is the basis of the critical reason that is central to Buddhist *praxis;* we can refer to it as existential rationality. The basis for moral action is empirical observation and reason (Schumann, 1989; Chah, 1992b), not practical reason, as in the categorical imperative. Critical reflexivity in Buddhist *praxis* refers to mindful self-investigation (*sati-panna*) which is the liberating factor in Buddhist meditation (Gunaratana, 1992; Sumedho; 1987, 1991; Goldstein, 1983; Nyanaponika, 1969). Mindfulness (*sati*) refers to the moment-to-moment observation of one's body and mind: *observing* whatever arises.

> The way out of suffering is meditation itself. To put it simply, we must be mindful. Mindfulness is knowing, or presence of mind. Right now what are we thinking, what are we doing? What do we have with us right now? We observe like this, we are aware of how we are living. We consider and investigate at all times. (Chah, 1994:36)

Self-investigation (*panna*) refers to the critique of this immediate existential observation of one's self (body & mind). Reason in this case is therefore not founded on abstract thought but on empirical existential observation.

Unlike the ahistorical nature of the categorical imperative, self-critique is embedded in one's immediate social context. In this regard, Buddhist practice reiterates the Twelve Step emphasis on being aware of relations with others. Furthermore, the moral community (*sangha*) is also essential in Buddhist praxis[22]. Although moral action is ultimately located in the individual, the practitioner nonetheless abides by the norms of a concrete moral community. Maintaining the precepts at the level of conformity to social norms is the necessary condition for insight, the ultimate source of moral agency. In Kantian ethics, there is no concrete moral community. From the Buddhist perspective, the insatiable consumer represents unrestrained craving, which is the source of suffering according to Buddhism. Desire is a thus central to in Buddhist meditation: to be free from craving, the individual must understand how desire operates. Therefore the insatiable consumer represents a fundamental mechanism of self-entrapment that must be comprehended if the individual is to be free in the Buddhist sense of the term enlightenment. Since understanding desire is the condition for enlightenment, Buddhist enlightenment is not separate from desire. In contrast, Kantian ethics posits a dualistic separation between desire and the ahistorical moral subject. Similarly, the Twelve Step program posits a dualistic separation between desire as infantile wilfulness and the surrender of that wilfulness to a higher moral power. The conceptualization of desire in Buddhism is set within a non-dualistic framework. There is no subject constituted as an entity separate from desire. For clarity, we can apply this theoretical discussion to a case history from a study by sociologist Sherry Turkle (1984).

2.3 The Case History of Deborah

In a study investigating the cultural impact of personal computers on American society, Turkle interviewed a sixth grade student called Deborah, who was enrolled in a progressive elementary school in Austin, Texas. Deborah was part of an experimental class in which each student was given free access to a computer and taught a simple programming language which the students used to make computer drawings. Deborah's case history appears in abbreviated form in Box 1.

Deborah first encountered the computer two years ago, in sixth grade. Her teachers remember her as withdrawn, frightened, and explosive. She had little self-confidence. When she was asked to do something on her own she would become petulant or tune out. Dependent on others and with an image of herself as sick, weak, and fat, Deborah had no confidence in her ability to say no to external control. By eleven, she was already involved in a crowd that was smoking, drinking, using drugs. Toward the end of that year Deborah was introduced to programming computers and shown how to draw pictures. Children experience making computer graphics as a source of great power. For Deborah, it was threatening. A breakthrough came when she had the idea of restricting the commands she could give to the computer. She made a rule that she would allow herself only one turning command—a right turn of thirty degrees. Once she had her rule, Deborah drew flowers, rabbits, stars, and abstract designs, everything built up from right turns of thirty degrees: "I really like my rule. It was neat. It was hard. I had to figure everything out. I thought about it all the time." Weeks later, Deborah was the master of her restricted world. The thirty degree world provided more than a first taste of success. Deborah first knew the computer as something apparently uncontrollable. Later, she saw the computer as something she could control.

Before she met the computer Deborah did not think of her problems in terms of control. Of course, she knew people who did not break things or cut classes or stuff themselves with candy until they were sick. She saw herself as different because they were that way by 'nature'. They were good, she was bad. The thirty degrees world not only suggested that control was the issue, it presented a strategy for dealing with one's lack of control: make a rule, make a safe place, experiment with it. Control has remained a central issue for Deborah. It is the thing she thinks about most: controlling her temper, her eating, her smoking:

"You program yourself how to be. In sixth grade I got really upset, and I started drinking and smoking. I don't even know why I did it. A lot of kids would say, 'Oh, you're a chicken.' And I'd say, 'I am not.' And I'd gulp down the beer. I didn't even want it. But I didn't know a thing to do. Then I'd start to make rules. The thirty degrees was for the computer, but these are for me. Like 'Today, I will not do this thing. Don't eat candy for lunch. If you're angry, hold it in and scream after school. Or I make a rule for two days. Like I'm gonna really work, try hard. I'm gonna do good on my English tests. I won't have a cigarette."

Box 1. An excerpt from the research of Sherry Turkle (1984: 141-147)

2.3.1 Kantian Ethics: Deborah's Rationality

Deborah's moral rationality is different from Kant's concept of practical reason in a number of ways. First, as in Kantian ethics, Deborah imposes her own laws upon her conduct; however, these are not universal self-imposed laws but rules restricted to her own conduct. In short, Deborah's moral reasoning is not directed to legislating laws for all rational beings. Secondly, her reasoning is oriented toward specific results: '*if* I 'really work, try hard' *then* 'I'm gonna do good on my English tests'. In making these rules to restrict her behavior, Deborah's reasoning is clearly instrumental. However, unlike instrumental rationality oriented toward controlling other people, Deborah's instrumental rationality is oriented toward controlling herself. It is a matter of self-mastery through self-imposed rules of conduct that exemplifies Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self."

Third, Deborah's rationality is existential rather than abstract. It issues directly from reflecting upon her actual experiences, first with the computer then with her conduct in school. She experiments with different rules that she herself has created just as a scientist tests hypotheses in the laboratory. In doing so, Deborah embodies the Western Enlightenment's ideal of individualism as Kant describes it in his essay, *What is Enlightenment?* Through the use of her reason, she solves her own problems "without direction from another" (Kant, 1971: 85). In short, she frees herself from her 'self-imposed immaturity' (i.e. her lack of self-control). However, rather than relying on abstract reason alone, Deborah was able to think through her personal problem because she had previously solved an earlier problem in computer programming. Put differently, her experience in problem solving was the condition for Deborah to make use of her own reason. In her case, maturity emerges from experience and reason. Deborah's story has an important affinity with Kantian ethics: she stepped out of her personal predicament through her own efforts. Deborah's case verifies the validity of Kant's insistence on the individual's moral autonomy[23]. We now turn to the Twelve Step perspective in which the moral community is a critical factor in recovery.

2.3.2 The Twelve Step Perspective: Deborah's Experience

Experience rather than rationality is what is key in the Twelve Step program. As in the 'moral inventory' component of the Twelve Step program, Deborah reflects on her own behavior and her relations with others. However, because she views her conduct in terms of self-control, Deborah addresses what she perceives to be her lack of self-control through self-imposed rules rather than through 'witnessing' or making amends to others.

Nonetheless, Deborah's story validates the importance of personal experience which is emphasized in the Twelve Step perspective as being central to attaining sobriety. The experience at issue here is that of being out of control. Deborah's early involvement with drugs and alcohol was rooted in her lack of self-control. Self-control is also a major concern for Twelve Step program participants, which is explicitly stated in the first step: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1953: 21). However, unlike the Twelve Step participant, Deborah does not surrender her will to a higher power to solve this problem. Furthermore she relies on her own effort rather than on a group effort in her struggle for self control. Therefore what 'experience' refers to in Deborah's case is different from what it refers to in the Twelve Step program.

In the Twelve Steps, experience refers to telling one's story: the personal story of an alcoholic. For Deborah, experience does not refer to an autobiographical practice but to her experience of being in control where there was no control, initially within the domain of computer programming then later within the domain of personal conduct. The significant difference is that Deborah is not 'solidifying' her past 'self' as does the Twelve Step participant. In fact, she does the opposite: she dissolved her past self. Previously Deborah assumed she was different from other people, and that 'by 'nature' they were good, she was bad.' Her past assumption of the solidity of the self dissolved in a new perception of the self as something that can be shaped or 'created': "You program yourself how to be...I'd start to make rules. The thirty degrees [rule] was for the computer, but these are for me."

Auto-biographical selfhood has no place in Deborah's story; rather than constructing an 'immoral' past self the way in which Twelve Step program participants solidify their biographies through witnessing, Deborah deconstructed her 'immoral' self. She no longer presumed that she, as an individual, was the problem. Deborah's change in self-perception was simultaneous with her capacity to deal effectively with self-control. The thirty-degree world not only suggested that control was the issue, it also provided her with a solution to the problem since "it presented a strategy for dealing with one's lack of control: make a rule, make a safe place, experiment with it." To summarize, the burden of essentialized selfhood was dropped in the process of resolving the more fundamental problem of self-control.

Self-control, in Deborah's story, is at the heart of moral autonomy. Her moral autonomy is not anchored outside her self, as it is for the Twelve Step participant whose surrender to a higher power marks the third of the

Twelve Steps: "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1953: 5)." The will in Deborah's case is different both from the rational free will central to Kantian ethics and to the surrender of one's will that is critical in the Twelve Steps. The will in Deborah's story is more similar to what Nietzsche has called the "will to power" which he equated with the '"will to freedom" (Kaufmann, 1968: 360)[24]. In summary, from the Twelve Step perspective, Deborah's self-reflection was the condition for her salvation from insatiable consumption: through reflecting on the lack of self control in her personal life, Deborah discovered she was capable of countering the force of habit and desire. Next we turn to the Buddhist perspective.

2.3.3 Theravada Buddhism: Deborah's Perception

Deborah's story encapsulates the relationship between desire and Buddhist *praxis*. Deborah freed herself through a process of self-reflection which began in her relationship to the computer. Through the mirror of programming Deborah developed a reflexive relationship with herself similar to that of the western Buddhist practitioner. Through self-reflection Deborah discovered she was not 'hard-wired' as being bad by nature, and realized instead that she could 'program' herself to be other than what she was.

Deborah's self-imposed rules approximate what is known as the gradual training in Theravada Buddhism. That is, she discovered the value of the basic level of ethical conduct, as demonstrated in Deborah's directives to herself: 'Don't eat candy for lunch. If you're angry, hold it in and scream after school.' What in gradual training is referred to as training the mind parallels what Deborah calls 'programming yourself how to be'. From the Theravada perspective, Deborah is learning how to take care of the mind.

In Deborah's case, moral agency is clearly situated within the individual, a feature that is central to both Kantian ethics and Theravada Buddhism. However, the individual's moral autonomy does not detract from the importance of the moral community[25]. It can be reasonably inferred that re-socialization within a moral community played an important role in Deborah's case since she did, in fact, find a different peer group. Whereas previously she was a misfit in the classroom, Deborah was now able to participate in computer programming with the same enthusiasm as her classmates. Her self-esteem as well as her social status in the class increased dramatically after she was recognized for her programming achievement by a visiting computer expert to the class (Turkle, 1984). However important it may be, the moral community is not the locus of moral agency in Theravada Buddhism, nor is moral reason. Rather it is direct perception. The locus of moral agency in Buddhist *praxis* is insight.

Deborah's success in resolving the lack of control she had experienced in regard to computer programming instilled in her the confidence to try to deal with the lack of control in regard to her personal conduct. It was in fact her 'insight' into her dilemma with the computer that enabled her to perceive her personal problems as one of lack of control.

Deborah's insight constitutes a psychological revolution that overthrew the assumption that she was 'by nature' bad. In its place, a new self-perception released Deborah from her fatalistic assumption of an unalterable 'essential' self. The insatiable consumer from the Theravada perspective resembles the notion of self-enslavement and self-mastery in Stoicism. However, from the Buddhist perspective, Deborah's problem with substance abuse is more accurately phrased in terms of *sense* restraint rather than *self* restraint. For example, one can be aware of the craving for a cigarette without any reference to being a smoker. It is unnecessary to anthropomorphize craving in terms of master-slave relations. One can directly observe the relationship between thought and craving. The assumption of an insatiable consumer, like a house of cards, may easily collapse once self-reflection unveils the insubstantiality of cravings[26].

In conclusion, Nietzsche's perspectival approach has been used in this chapter to situate within a broader cultural context the detailed exposition of Buddhist *praxis* that will be undertaken in the following chapters. The purpose of this comparative exercise was to accentuate the distinctiveness of the Buddhist perspective by juxtaposing it with Kantian ethics and the Twelve Step perspective. It was suggested that the insatiable consumer would be differently framed according to each worldview.

The aim was to investigate how consumption in each case could be construed in terms of desire and moral agency. In Kantian ethics, the individual is the source of moral agency, and the 'free will' of this ahistorical moral subject operates independently of desire and inclination. From this perspective the insatiable consumer is driven by interests external to the individual's moral autonomy. In the Twelve Steps perspective, desire is construed as the individual's infantile wilfulness. The source of moral agency lies outside the individual, in a 'greater power' (God), and salvation requires a group effort. In Theravada Buddhism direct understanding of desire is the condition for freedom from human suffering, which is ultimately rooted in the assumption of an essential self.

Having examined how desire, moral agency, and the self are differently constituted within each of these interpretive frameworks, we can now proceed to consider in greater detail how consumerism could be framed within the Buddhist perspective. As the above discussion suggests, the Buddhist concept of desire is central to the investigation of the relationship between modern Buddhist *praxis* and consumer society. In the following chapter, an exposition of the Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha*) will be undertaken by relating it to three sociological theories of consumption. The objective in the next chapter is to amalgamate a selective reading of these three theories of consumption in order to construct a synthetic model of consumerism predicated on the Buddhist concept of desire. Veblen's thoery (1979), the first sociological theory of consumption, provides a classical point of departure for considering two contemporary theories of consumption: that of Baudrillard (1968, 1970) and Campbell (1987). Campbell (1987) claims the pursuit of *pleasure* is the key to the mystery of the insatiable modern consumer; Veblen identifies social *prestige* as the key. Baudrillard (1968, 1970) claims it is the *lack* of social relationship that is the answer to the mystery. The next chapter argues that these theories each represent a different aspect of the Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha*). The combination of certain features of the sociological theories of Veblen, Baudrillard, and Campbell as seen through the Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha*) will provide the basis for a model of consumption that will facilitate the investigation of the interface between western Buddhist practice and consumerism.

Chapter Three: The Buddhist Concept of Desire

A Selective Combination of Three Theories of Consumption

3.1 Sociological Reflections on Market Consumption

The insatiability of the modern consumer, according to Colin Campbell (1987), is the mystery of modern consumption. Why is the modern consumer never satisfied? Why is he or she constantly craving to consume more and more? We will examine three sociological theories that address the mystery. Thorstein Veblen, Jean Baudrillard, and Colin Campbell each propose different explanations for this sociological enigma: Veblen proposes a theory of social emulation; Campbell, a theory of modern hedonism; and Baudrillard, a theory of social nihilism. The Buddhist concept of desire provides a theoretical basis for integrating certain features of these three apparently disparate sociological explanations of the insatiable consumer. The proposed synthesis accentuates the complementarity of the three perspectives. We begin then with a brief introduction to each of these perspectives, followed by their integration through the framework of the Buddhist concept of desire.

3.1.1 Campbell's Critique of Social Emulation

In the late 1970s it was discovered that consumer demand played a decisive role in the development of industrial society from the very onset of the modern era. Economic historians discovered that a 'consumer revolution' had accompanied the first Industrial Revolution in eighteenth century England (Thirsk,1978; McKendrick, Brewer , and Plumb, 1982). Furthermore, this first 'consumer revolution' did not follow from the Industrial Revolution but apparently shaped the scope and direction of the Industrial Revolution. Industrial production was often geared to meet an already existing demand and increased accordingly. In short, the Industrial Revolution did not 'cause' the first consumer revolution. If the steep rise in consumer demand was not a result of the increased productivity due to industrialization, then what accounts for it? To explain the 'consumer revolution' in eighteenth century England, the standard account economic historians use is Veblen's social emulation thesis (Campbell, 1987): "If consumer demand, then, was the key to the Industrial Revolution, social emulation was the key to consumer demand" (Harold Perkin, Ibid: 17). Each class presumably strove to emulate the class immediately above it. For example, the middle classes emulated the aristocracy by purchasing luxury goods, while lower classes emulated the middle classes.

Campbell rejects this explanation for the sudden rise in demand. In his historical study of consumption in eighteenth century England, Campbell found no evidence to support the hypothesis that the first consumer revolution was the result of social emulation. According to Campbell, the consumer demand was primarily middle class; it was not a general social phenomenon. Furthermore, he contends the English middle classes despised the English aristocracy. The Puritan ethic that was chiefly carried by the English middle classes, who valorized Puritan values such as thrift and frugality, therefore it is unlikely they were emulating the aristocratic extravagance. Finally, Campbell points out that the consumer demand was not for luxury goods associated with the aristocracy but for bourgeois goods & services: middle class commodities such as buckles, buttons, pins, cutlery, magazines.

Campbell therefore concludes that the first consumer revolution was not due to social emulation. To account for the steep rise in consumer demand, Campbell proposes an alternative theory in which consumption is depicted as a modern form of hedonism. Modern hedonism, according to Campbell, is an extension of traditional hedonism, the pursuit of physical sensual pleasure, to which is added the pursuit of emotional gratification. The modern consumer achieves emotional pleasure through fantasy and daydream. According to Campbell's theory, emotional pleasure-seeking rather than social emulation accounts for the first consumer revolution.

3.1.2 Baudrillard's Mass Theory

Baudrillard's explanation for the mystery of the insatiable consumer is that the social has disappeared into an undifferentiated mass (Ritzer, 1997). Just as Nietzsche proclaimed the 'death of God' (Kaufmann, 1968), Baudrillard proclaims the 'death of the social' (Ritzer, 1997). What Baudrillard means by the 'death of the social' is that "key social factors such as class and ethnic differences have disappeared with the creation of a huge, undifferentiated mass" (Ibid: 78). Baudrillard's theory of mass society[27] rests on two premises: 1) The social has 'imploded' into the mass, and 2) the mass is a statistical rather than a social category: "Since the mass is a nonsocial (rather, a statistical) category, and since the social has imploded into it, the social is dead" (Ibid).

For example, the "huge undifferentiated" mass audience of a televised hockey game is a statistical category that is rationally factored into its sale as a commodity by television stations to advertisers. The individuals who constitute this mass have virtually no social relationship to each other. Baudrillard (1996) claims that it is upon a *lack* of reality, a social 'reality that is absent', that the insatiability of the modern consumer pivots: "Consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a *lack*" (Ibid: 205; original emphasis). Baudrillard's model suggests that the disappearance of the social into the mass generates a perpetual identity crisis for modern individuals. The undifferentiated mass is itself the condition for irrepressible consumption since what we actually seek in consumption is social *difference*. What drives consumer insatiability, according to Baudrillard, is a pressing need for social differentiation by which "we seek to align ourselves with some and differentiate ourselves from others on the basis of what we consume...By being different we acquire social status and social meaning" (Ritzer, 1997: 82).

Here Baudrillard has not, as Slater (1999) has charged, simply "appropriated" Veblen's theory. For Veblen, the driving force in consumption is social *prestige*. For Baudrillard, the motivating factor is the need for social *difference*. Nevertheless Baudrillard upholds the Veblenesque emphasis on social distinction, an emphasis which Campbell also acknowledges. Veblen must therefore be credited for being the first social theorist to identify the significant role that social distinction plays in consumerism.

3.1.3 Veblen's Concept of Social Emulation

While Campbell rejects the social emulation explanation for the first consumer revolution, he points out that the English middle classes were competing among themselves to outdo each other in terms of *bourgeois* goods and services. He proposes that reference group theory is a more appropriate theoretical orientation since it stresses the importance of social distinction while making it unnecessary to explain consumer demand in terms of class distinction. Campbell thereby indirectly acknowledges the validity of Veblen's emphasis on social distinction.

What Campbell takes issue with is not Veblen's theory per se but the selective way in which it has been appropriated by economic historians. Campbell states that Veblen used the phrase 'social emulation' in two senses. The first sense refers to imitating the lifestyle of the class immediately above one's own class. The second sense refers to competing with people within one's own class. Social emulation in this second sense is typically thought of as 'keeping up with the Joneses.' However, what Veblen was referring to is not merely *keeping up* with one's social peers but with *out-doing* them. Veblen states, "the motive is emulation— the stimulus of an invidious comparison which prompts us to outdo those with whom we are in the habit of classing ourselves" (1979: 103). In challenging the economic historians' explanation for the first consumer revolution, Campbell rejects the first sense of Veblen's concept of social emulation; however, he does not take issue with its second sense.

Similarly, Baudrillard (1996; 1998) also rejects the first sense of social emulation. Insatiable consumption is not due to the pursuit of social *prestige*, according to Baudrillard, but due to striving for social *difference*. To be more precise, it is not the pursuit of social difference per se that drives the insatiability but the loss of social reality. It is the surface structure of consumption whose deep structure is explained by Baudrillard's version of nihilism. Social distinction is important, as Veblen claims, but what ultimately makes consumption irrepressible, according to Baudrillard, is that consumption destroys meaningful social relationship which is then sought in the objects of consumption. Consumerism destroys social relationship to the extent that it renders the social meaningless. The meaning that is achieved through the objects of consumption is determined by the system of objects (commodities), not by social relations. What meaning there is in consumption is therefore located in the system of objects: The value of a commodity is determined by its location in relation to all other commodities. A Rolex watch, for example, has value only in relation to other watches such as Timex, etc. This system of objects constitutes a 'code' of signification, a sign system[28] through which relations of consumption operate.

> Objects of consumption are part of a sign system. When we consume objects, we are consuming signs, and in the process are defining ourselves. People are what they consume and are differentiated from other types of people on the basis of consumed objects....In consuming certain objects we are signifying that we are similar to those who also consume those objects and that we are different from those who consume other objects. It is the code then that controls what we do or do not consume (Ritzer 1997: 80-81).

The loss of reality occurs, according to Baudrillard, because consumption transforms human relationships into relationships with objects. Objects no longer acquire meaning from concrete relationships with people. For example, a divorced father visits his young son every other weekend and they spend a few hours together. The father buys his son gifts, takes him to a game or to a movie, and so on. It is through the consumption of goods and services that the relationship is maintained. What is maintained, however, is a meaningless social relationship. It is the lack of social relationship that drives the consumption.

So why then do people keep consuming? According to Baudrillard, what we buy *signifies* a meaning but does not *symbolize* a meaningful *social* relationship. Social relationship is evacuated by the code of signified meanings conveyed through object relations; consequently, social reality is lost. The loss of reality drives the insatiable consumer in so far as the lack of meaningful social relations compels modern consumers to seek meaning in socially meaningless object relations. Consumption can therefore be construed as the articulation of meaningless social relations, or nihilism. In conclusion, Veblen's theory is important to both Campbell and Baudrillard. Although Campbell and Baudrillard reject the social emulation hypothesis as an explanation for the insatiable consumer, they both acknowledge Veblen's emphasis on social distinction.

3.2 The Buddhist Concept of Desire

We can now consider the interface between market consumption and Theravada Buddhism. The theories of consumption proposed by Veblen, Campbell, and Baudrillard can be synthesized within the framework of the Theravadin concept of desire (*tanha*). According to Sumedho[29], an American Buddhist monk, *tanha* consists of three kinds of desire: "desire for sense pleasure (*kama tanha*), desire to become (*bhava tanha*), and desire to get rid of (*vibhava tanha*)" (1992: 29-30). These three aspects of the Buddhist concept of desire are depicted in Figure 1 as *wanting, wanting to become*, and *not wanting*. In the following discussion of the proposed synthesis, three points should be noted in regard to *tanha*.

1) There are six senses in Buddhism, not five (Nyanaponika, 1969b). The *mind* is also considered to be a sense, in addition to the five physical senses of sight, sounds, smell, taste, physical feeling. The desire for sensual pleasure therefore refers not only to craving for pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical feelings but also refers to the craving for pleasurable emotions, perceptions, volitions, and states of consciousness.

2) The desire to become (*bhava tanha),* does not only refer to wanting to be *other* than what you are, but also refers to wanting *not* to be what you are (*vibhava tanha*). Therefore the *desire to get rid of* operates together with the desire *to become* in the desire *not to be* (Sumedho, 1992).

Fig 1

3) The desire *to get rid of* subsumes the desire to avoid, which is exemplified in Freud's concept of repression[30]: the unconscious avoidance of painful thoughts (Zimbardo, 1992). The hedonistic pursuit of pleasure functions as an active avoidance of that which is unpleasant to face consciously.

The concept of *tanha* is central to Theravada Buddhism. It has been defined in English as 'thirst' and 'craving': Craving or desire for pleasure can find satisfaction but

> its possession soon becomes a habit, and more is desired'; craving for becoming means craving for a new or different form; it may be craving for 'a life free from suffering', or striving for wealth and happiness. But when disillusioned with trying to become something other than we are, we want to get rid of the things obtained (Schumann, 1989: 55-7).

In other words, craving fuels the desire to move away from that which is unpleasant (Schumann, 1989; Sumedho, 1992b).

Insatiable consumption can be understood then in terms of sense desire, the desire to become, and the desire to get rid of (See Figure 2). *Sense desire* is encapsulated in Campbell's notion of modern hedonism. The *desire to become* is the operating principle in Veblen's emphasis on social distinction. The *desire to get rid of* inheres as unconscious avoidance in Baudrillard's nihilistic view of consumption.

Fig 2

The purpose of introducing the Buddhist concept of desire is to integrate the foregoing discussion of the three theories of consumption. It is desire in each case that compels the insatiable consumer. Importantly, the three aspects of tanha are not different kinds of desire, but are three aspects of desire (Sumedho, 1992b). Although the objects of desire vary it is the same movement in each case. Schopenhauer[31], who translated *tanha* as "a will to live, its nature being thirst," regarded the three types of *tanha* as "essentially...all the same whether we pursue, flee, fear, harm, or aspire to enjoyment" (quoted in Nanajivako, 1988: 53). The concept of tanha as the single movement of desire makes it possible to integrate the three theories of consumption. Each theorist accentuates a different aspect of consumption as the single movement of desire. Campbell's concept of consumerism as modern hedonism represents that aspect of *tanha* which is referred to as sense desire, to which we now turn.

3.2.1 Sense Desire

As mentioned earlier, Campbell (1987) distinguishes modern from traditional hedonism. Traditional hedonism refers to sensual gratification whereas, in addition to the pursuit of physical pleasure, modern hedonism also involves the pursuit of emotional pleasure. Campbell claims that the center of gravity has shifted from sensual to emotional gratification. Seeking sensual pleasure still falls within the scope of modern hedonism but the scope of pursued pleasure has expanded to encompass sentimental feelings. To indulge in the pleasure of sentimental feelings involves the practice of creative imagination, which consists of fantasy and daydream. Using creative imagination for the purpose of emotional gratification, claims Campbell, constitutes a distinctly modern practice that is intrinsic to consumerism. In sum then, it is the pursuit of emotional gratification through creative imagination that distinguishes modern from traditional hedonism.

Campbell traces the cultural source of modern hedonism back to the Romantic movement. Romanticism elevated feeling above reason and used the creative imagination for the purpose of moral and spiritual renewal. Today, however, the use of creative imagination carries on the cult of sentimentality through relations of consumption solely for the purpose of emotional gratification. Following from his critique of Romanticism, Campbell portrays the insatiable consumer as a modern hedonist perpetually indulging in emotional gratification through the imaginative practices of fantasy and daydream. He differentiates between these two practices on the basis of their relationship to the lifeworld.

According to Campbell, fantasy exercises the imagination "in ways unrestricted by reality" in that the imagined scenario is "not to be constrained by those factors which limit the possibilities of ordinary life" (Ibid: 83). An example of hedonistic fantasy is the movie *The Titanic*, a popular romantic fantasy that is little more than a Disneyland version of a Virginia Slims commercial where Virginia 'baby' meets Peter Pan. Fantasy is not bound to the lifeworld, as illustrated in the movie by the emotional gratification elicited when the creative imagination is directed to a never-never land on the bow of the *Titanic* where Peter Pan teaches Virginia how to fly. In contrast to the impossible dreams of fantasy, daydream "requires that incidents should be kept within the bounds of the possible, even if highly improbable" (Ibid).

Day-dreaming differs from fantasy in that it introduces "the principle of pleasure-seeking" into "speculation about, the future" (Ibid). An example of the future orientation that characterizes daydreaming is the act of buying a million-dollar-lottery ticket and imagining what you would do with the money if you won it. As in fantasy, the purpose of daydreaming "is that images are elaborated in order to increase pleasure and not for any other reason," the only difference being that these images "still contain that element of possibility that separates them from pure fantasy" (Ibid). Put differently, daydreaming involves a hedonistic practice of creative imagination that is grounded in social reality[32].

Campbell is quick to add that the early Romantics had never "intended to grant legitimacy to modern consumerism or that spirit of self-indulgent hedonism upon which it is based" (Ibid: 207). The pursuit of emotional pleasure that Romanticism advocated had a higher purpose than self-indulgent hedonism toward which the use of creative imagination is now directed[33].

> Pleasure-seeking was not regarded as an end in itself but as a means to moral and spiritual renewal. Consequently, the Romantics were scathing in their attacks upon those who engaged in the search for mere stimulation and excitement (Ibid).

Campbell cites as an example the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850), who "inveighed against emotional stimulation engaged in for 'idle' reasons, and not for conveying truth or creating a moral sensibility" (Ibid). Modern hedonism resulted, according to Campbell, as an unintended and unforseen consequence of early Romanticism's use of fantasy and daydream as a pleasurable means for spiritual and moral renewal.

> Romanticism's connection with modern consumerism must be viewed as ironic, for although the Romantics certainly did intend both to provide pleasure and to promote day-dreaming, they cannot be regarded as having sought an outcome in which these combined to facilitate the restless pursuit of profit (Ibid).

The restless pursuit of pleasure not profit is what is at issue here. Rather than a means to a noble end, emotional pleasure-seeking became an end in itself in market consumption: fantasy and daydream are the media through which the insatiable consumer perpetually seeks emotional gratification. The use of creative imagination, instead of bringing about moral or spiritual renewal, has simply encouraged amoral hedonistic fantasizing and daydreaming.

As amoral modern hedonism, consumption's relationship to Romantic praxis is particularly ironic since the Romantic movement was responding to the cultural crisis of nihilism[34]. A "will to value," claims Lockridge (1989: 3), "is the dominant tendency in Romantic writers; it is their response to a moment in history when concepts of value are seen to be reduced or denuded." This 'moment in history' was, to Nietzsche, the cultural crisis he referred to as nihilism, the transitional period of nihilism being "a consequence of the fact that God and all eternal truths and standards become unbelievable. The highest values devalue themselves" (Gillespie, 1995: xi). Consumption exemplifies this nihilistic process of devaluation whereby modern hedonism denudes the Romantic movement of its high moral purpose. The theme of nihilism will be taken up later in connection to Baudrillard's work where the condition of nihilism is argued to have a direct bearing on consumer insatiability.

To conclude, Campbell identifies the pleasure principle, which corresponds to sense desire (*kama tanha*), as the key to the mystery of modern consumption. Since the mind is one of the senses in Buddhism, the pursuit of emotional pleasure can be subsumed under sense desire. In contrast to Campbell, Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption identifies the second aspect of *tanha*, the desire to become (*bhava tanha*), as the explanation for the insatiability of the modern consumer. It is to this feature of the Buddhist concept of desire to which we now turn.

3.2.2 Desire to Become

As previously mentioned, although Campbell only rejects the first sense of Veblen's concept of social emulation, he does not take issue with the second. While the English middle classes were not emulating the aristocracy, they were perpetually competing among themselves for social status. The Puritan desire to be one of the Elect, predestined by God for heaven, turns on the invidious distinction between the visible church (comprising all church members) and the invisible church (consisting of church members chosen by God for heaven). Campbell describes how the Puritan practice of social comparison survived Puritanism in the transition from Protestant asceticism to Romantic hedonism: where once it was important for the Protestant bourgeois to demonstrate he was among the predestined Elect through his accumulation of wealth, it later became important for him to show he was a 'man of feeling' through public displays of charged emotion, and still later, a 'man of taste' by staying in fashion. In each case middle class Protestants competed with each other in approximating the prevailing ideal of bourgeois respectability. Social emulation in the second sense, that is, of drawing invidious social distinctions, demarcated each phase of the historical transition from the spiritual materialism of the Protestant ascetic to the spiritless consumption of the modern consumer. The desire to become, that is, wanting to be or *not* to be, can be regarded as the operating principle in what Veblen refers to as "invidious distinction" (1979: 34).

Invidious distinction refers to "a personal quality of superiority or inferiority" (Ibid: 8) that is conveyed through the ownership of possessions or the lack thereof. "The possession of wealth confers honour. It is an invidious distinction" (Ibid: 26). Veblen refuted the view of classical economics according to which consumption is a matter of satisfying human needs, and argued instead that consumption had more to do with social honour than with need satisfaction[35].

> Ownership began and grew into a human institution on grounds unrelated to the subsistence minimum [that is, to need satisfaction]. The dominant incentive was from the outset the invidious distinction attaching to wealth (Ibid).

According to Veblen, invidious social comparison emerged in the transition from peaceable primitive savagery to predatory barbarism, the latter being characterized by a consistently warlike habit of life. To Veblen, modernity represents a developed stage of barbarism in which wealth has become "intrinsically honourable and confers honour on its possessor" (Ibid):

> As fast as a person makes new acquisitions and becomes accustomed to the resulting new standard of wealth, the new standard...ceases to afford appreciably greater satisfaction than the earlier standard did. The tendency in any case is constantly to make the present pecuniary standard the point of departure for a fresh increase of wealth...and a new pecuniary classification of one's self as compared with one's neighbours (Ibid: 31).

According to Veblen's account then, the motivation behind consumption is the desire to achieve social distinction. The competitive practice of invidious social comparison can be extended to include a debilitating dimension in modern selfhood which has been described in Stone & Stone's (1993) concept of the inner critic[36]. In this case, competitive social comparison is internalized as an invidious distinction between 'what I am' and 'what I should be'. So, for example, the anorexic girl repeatedly attacks herself with the critical perception that 'I should not be as fat as I am.' Even on the verge of starving to death the anorexic maintains this invidious distinction (Bordo, 1988; Brumberg, 1988; Epling & Pierce, 1991). The reification of the thin female body, for which elite young women are willing to die, conveys competition for social status as does the reification of expensive running shoes, for which ghetto youth are willing to kill.

To conclude, Veblen's emphasis on invidious social distinction illustrates the second aspect of *tanha:* the desire to become. Although Baudrillard follows in the footsteps of Veblen, he does not consider the pursuit of social prestige to be the answer to the mystery of the insatiable consumer. His 'nihilistic' view of consumption implies the third aspect of *tanha*: the desire to avoid.

3.2.3 Desire to Avoid

Prior to examining Baudrillard's answer to the mystery of consumption, it is necessary to provide the background of his work. Since Baudrillard's later work goes well beyond the issue of consumerism and is weakly linked to sociological theory, only his early work will be considered in this study, and more specifically the theory of consumption that appears in his books *The System of Objects* (1968) and *The Consumer Society* (1970). Baudrillard began as a neo-marxist cultural critic, heavily influenced by the work of Guy Debord and the Situationists.

> For Marx, as for Debord and Baudrillard, capitalism represents a rupture in history, the overthrow of the medieval era by a radically secularized modern world and its utilitarian imperatives. In capitalism we find the dissolution of organic social and natural relations in the development of a fragmenting division of labour and an unprecedented

> structure where commodity production is the purpose of society and maximization of profit is the purpose of commodity production (Best, 1994: 43).

From the Marxist perspective, a commodity is an object produced in order to be exchanged. According to Marx, the modern process of commodification involves a shift from relationships based on use-value to relationships based on exchange value (Jhally, 1998b). In traditional society, the objects produced were used by those who produced them, with little surplus remaining that could be used for exchange. In modern society, objects are produced for exchange. Jhally (1998b) claims this distinction between use-value and exchange-value is the basis of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, according to which objects mask the social relations through which they were produced .

> Objects come to stand for the social relationships. People's thinking about the social relations involved in their work is then characterized by a fetishism whereby beliefs about objects mask the social relations themselves. (Abercrombie, 1984: 43)

The mystery of consumption, for Marx, lies in the enigmatic nature of the commodity, as the following oft-quoted statement by Marx makes explicit.

> A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties (Marx, 1954 [1887]: 71).

Baudrillard's neo-marxist cultural critique orients itself toward the object of consumption rather than toward the subject, the insatiable consumer, as made evident in the title of his first book, *The System of Objects*. Marx begins his analysis of the capitalist mode of production in *Capital* with a discussion of the enigma posed by the commodity. Marx choose the commodity rather than capital or labour as the starting point of his exposition since to understand "how the commodity was produced, distributed, exchanged, and consumed", in Marx's view, would "unravel the whole system" because "the social relations of production are *reflected* in goods" (Jhally, 1998b: 26).

As mentioned earlier, Marx drew a distinction between the use-value and exchange-value of commodities. Baudrillard takes issue with Marx on this point. There is no mystery in a commodity's use-value for Marx; the commodity's enigma lies in its exchange-value. In that case, contends Baudrillard, commodity fetishism "is not a function of the commodity defined *simultaneously* as exchange-value and use-value, but of exchange-value alone (Ibid: 37)." Baudrillard attacks Marx for treating use-value as an ahistorical, "objective, final relation of intrinsic purpose'" rather than as an historical social relation in which no intrinsic meaning inheres in the commodity (Ibid)[37]. "There is nothing inherent in the object as such to give it an intrinsic meaning, and depending on its place in a given sign system it can take any one of these meanings" (Ibid).

Baudrillard denies the 'underlying reality' that Marx claimed is hidden by commodification[38]. Instead, there is a structural relationship between the objects themselves in which sign-value rather than use-value (or exchange-value) is the important factor. An object, according to Baudrillard, must be transformed into a sign before it can be consumed. A new car, for example, must be located in relation to other cars, that is, its position relative to BMWs, Porches, Datsuns, etc, for it to be transformed into a sign. Each sign has a particular sign value that refers to the social distinction an object confers upon its possessor. The value of an object then is determined by its position in relation to all other objects, which together constitute the 'system of objects' that Baudrillard calls the 'code'[39], through which social identities are constituted and regulated.

3.2.3.1 Market Consumption as Nihilism

Against Marx, Baudrillard emphasizes the social relations of *consumption* as opposed to the social relations of *production* (Ritzer, 1997). Instead of the use-value versus exchange-value distinction, Baudrillard distinguishes between symbolic exchange and economic exchange. Rather than proposing a *hidden* underlying social reality, Baudrillard proposes that there is instead a *loss* of social reality due to the erosion of symbolic exchange by the spread of economic exchange. This thesis, the loss of reality, anchors Baudrillard's theory to Nietzsche's philosophy of nihilism.

> The great philosophical question used to be 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' Today, the real question is: 'Why is there nothing rather than something?' (Baudrillard, 1998: 2)

When Baudrillard (1996 [1968]) endeavours to define consumption at the end of *The System of Objects*, he concludes that "consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a *lack*" (Ibid: 205, original emphasis). The lack of reality, according to Baudrillard, is what drives the "limitless process of consumption at every turn to make up for a reality that is absent" (Ibid). Reality here refers to social reality which, for Baudrillard, is based on symbolic exchange (Gane, 1991; Ritzer, 1997) such that the erosion of symbolic exchange entails the loss of social reality.

Baudrillard links the lack of reality to the 'need' for social difference. It is important to note that Baudrillard distinguishes between objective needs and the 'need' for social distinction: "The unstoppable advance and boundless renewal of needs...is irreconcilable with the rationalist theory that a satisfied need creates a state of equilibrium and resolution of tensions" (Baudrillard, 1998: 77). Consumption is understood in classical economics as need satisfaction, the commonsense view that 'I buy this because I need it'. Dismissing the 'rationalist mythology of needs and satisfactions' upheld by classical economics as a naive view of consumption, Baudrillard (1998) distinguishes between the function an object serves (objective need) and the social significance of owning the object (sign value).

> Outside the field of its objective function, where it is irreplaceable, outside the field of its denotation, the object becomes substitutable in a more or less unlimited way within the field of connotation, where it assumes sign-value. Thus the washing machine *serves* as an appliance and *acts* as an element of prestige, comfort, etc. It is strictly this latter field which is the field of consumption (Ibid: 77).

Need satisfaction for Baudrillard is precisely what consumption is *not* about: to be more precise, consumerism does not pertain to *objective* need. The field of consumption falls within the domain of social signification rather than that of objective need. Since the sign-value of a commodity can be separated from its concrete function, other commodities can substitute for it at the abstract level of social signification.

> All kinds of other objects may be substituted here for the washing machine as signifying element. In the logic of signs...objects are no longer linked in any sense to a *definite* function or need [because] they are responding here to something quite different, which is either the social logic or the logic of desire, for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of signification. (Ibid)

Baudrillard proposes a model of consumption as an unconscious structure of 'subjective needs' that operate according to the rules of 'the social logic or the logic of desire'. Insatiable consumption is irrepressible because, whereas objective needs can be satisfied, desires cannot be satisfied nor can the 'need' for social difference be satisfied within mass society. Consumption thus constitutes a world of objects and subjective needs but not objective needs and satisfactions. An objective need can be pinned down to an objective function, which makes an object irreplaceable. For example, a person working in the city that lives outside the city may have an objective need for a car in order to get to work. In contrast, the 'subjective needs' in consumption cannot be pinned down to an objective function, and are therefore substitutable like the objects of consumption themselves. A person driving to work may have subjective needs' not for a car, but for a certain kind of car such as a BMW, depending on the social prestige he seeks. The subjective 'need' for social prestige can also be substituted by where one goes for vacation, the house one lives in, etc., rather than the car one drives to work. The insatiable consumer's "flight from one signifier to another is merely the superficial reality of a *desire* which is, for its part, insatiable because it is based on lack. And it is this forever unquenchable desire which signifies itself locally in successive objects and needs" (Ibid) .

Baudrillard's model suggests that a 'deep structure' underlies the 'surface structure' of the insatiable consumer's unquenchable desire for more and more commodities. Baudrillard claims that subjective "need is never so much the need for a particular object as the 'need' for difference (*the* *desire for the social meaning*)" so that "there can never be any *achieved* satisfaction" (Ibid: 77-8). What the surface structure of shifting desires and differential significations veils is "the true spheres of signification—the spheres of lack and difference" (Ibid: 78). Baudrillard therefore reiterates Veblen's emphasis on social distinction as an integral feature of the insatiable consumer. However, social distinction is one side of Baudrillard's implied unconscious 'deep structure' of consumption; the other is lack, that is, the lack of social reality. There is a cyclical relationship involved whereby the lack of reality drives the engine of consumption which, in turn, evacuates social reality: "We live in a world where the highest function of the sign is to make reality disappear and, at the same time, to mask that disappearance" (Baudrillard, 1996: 5).

Consumption does not hide the absent social reality but is the articulation of it. Social reality, for Baudrillard, is based upon symbolic exchange. Meaningful social relationship, in other words, is predicated on symbolic exchange. The code of signification, in contrast, is predicated on economic exchange. The spread of economic exchange, epitomized by the code of signification in consumption, has eroded symbolic exchange so that the basis of reality has been lost. The meaning that objects of consumption signify is determined not by symbolic social relations but by the relationship of objects to each other (i.e. by the code of signification).

Objects do not symbolize the social relationships in which they appear and are therefore socially meaningless. Consumption thereby destroys social reality. Baudrillard's proclamation of the 'death of the social' is therefore synonymous with meaningless consumption.

In conclusion, nihilism (or social meaninglessness) is the engine of insatiability in Baudrillard's model of consumption. This unconscious nihilistic principle operating within the relations of consumption represents the third aspect of *tanha*, the desire to get rid of.

3.2.3.2 The Avoidance of Existential Angst

> It has to be made clear that objects and material goods are not in fact the ~~object of~~ consumption -- they are the object merely of needs and of the satisfaction of needs. From time immemorial people have bought, possessed, enjoyed, and spent, but this does not mean that they were 'consuming'... if we are justified in using this term to describe present-day society...neither the volume of goods nor the satisfaction of needs serves properly to define the notion of consumption, for these are simply the preconditions of consumption. Consumption is not a material practice.
>
> Baudrillard, 1996: 199

Baudrillard (1996) rejects the utilitarian definition of consumption as the 'satisfaction of needs', as do both Veblen and Campbell. Needs can be satisfied, whereas consumers cannot: "people simply want to consume more and more" (Ibid: 200). However, neither hedonism nor invidious social comparison is the engine of consumer culture for Baudrillard. It is proposed here that it is the desire to escape the existential fact of social nihilism, not pleasure-seeking or the striving for social status, that propels consumerism. Baudrillard illustrates the nihilistic relations of consumption in the case of the modern couple who are wholly immersed in the exchange relations that epitomise consumerism.

> Take the couple, for example, whose objective *raison d'etre* is the consumption of objects -- including the objects that formerly symbolized the relationship...In the Unites States married couples have even been encouraged to get new wedding rings every year, and to make their relationship 'meaningful' by buying gifts 'together'...Far from symbolizing the relationship, what these objects actually describe...is the relationship's emptiness....Nor can it be said that objects are an automatic substitute for the relationship that is lacking, that they serve to fill a void: on the contrary, they *describe* this void, the locus of the relationship... [which] deals only with the *idea* of a relationship, not with a relationship that can be lived. (Baudrillard, 1996: 201-3; original emphasis)

The nihilistic relationship this example describes can be construed in terms of the desire to get rid of, manifesting in this case as the desire to avoid. Insatiable consumption is an active avoidance of the fact that, as it stands, the relationship is socially meaningless. The key to the mystery of consumption then in Baudrillard's critique of consumerism can be construed as the unconscious avoidance of existential angst. What drives the 'limitless process of consumption' is the pressing existential need "at every moment to make up for a reality that is absent. Consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a *lack*" (Ibid: 205). *Lack*, here, refers to the lack of meaningful social relationship. Therefore Baudrillard's critique implies that the unconscious avoidance of social nihilism is the engine of insatiability.

While Baudrillard's social difference thesis bridges his theory of consumption to Veblen's theory, his social nihilism thesis bridges it to Campbell's theory. For both Baudrillard and Campbell desire is the locus of consumption. The desire to flee from, to avoid, to ignore, is as much a desire as the desire to pursue pleasure. Campbell and Baudrillard are therefore describing the same movement, the movement of desire, albeit in different directions. Although Campbell equates hedonism with pursuing pleasure, egotistic hedonism denotes both the "desire *to secure pleasure*" and the "desire *to avoid pain*" (Angeles, 1981: 13-14. Emphasis added). The common factor in both cases is desire. If Campbell's concept is understood in terms of both senses of hedonism, then the avoidance of existential angst is the logical counterpart of the pursuit of pleasurable sentiment. Baudrillard's critique thereby complements Campbell's definition of modern hedonism. The third aspect of the Buddhist concept of *tanha*, the desire to get rid of, inheres in Baudrillard's model as the avoidance of existential angst: *not wanting* to face the lack of a social reality.

To summarize, nihilism appears in Baudrillard's work as a loss of social reality. The need to make up for meaningless social relationship drives consumption. I have proposed that desire, as the unconscious avoidance of this nihilistic 'social fact', is what drives consumption. The three sociological theories discussed in this chapter were synthesized as different aspects of the Buddhist concept of desire to formulate a model of consumption so as to explore the relationship between consumerism and Buddhist *praxis*. Before turning to the relationship between the *tanha* model and modern Buddhist *praxis*, it is important to distinguish between self indulgence and the insatiability of the modern consumer.

3.3 Is Consumer Insatiability Simply Self-Indulgence?

Since the demand for immediate gratification is a positive value in consumer society, can the consumer's insatiability be regarded as self-indulgence? Unlike traditional Christianity, consumer culture does not constrain the tendency to indulgence oneself but actively condones it. For example, in feudal Christendom gluttony was considered a deadly sin. Although gluttony no doubt nonetheless occurred in medieval society, it was not actively condoned by feudal culture. We need not reach so far back as medieval society to identify the distinctiveness of consumer culture. In modern society itself consumer culture apparently contradicts the industrial discipline inculcated by the modern workplace (Bell, 1976). Work culture and consumer culture represent what Daniel Bell calls "the cultural contradictions of capitalism." Bell argues that

> the culture of consumption encourages an ethic of hedonism and thus undermines industrial discipline. Advanced capitalism is at odds with itself, in [Bell's] view: it needs consumers who demand immediate gratification and deny themselves nothing, but it also needs self-denying producers willing to throw themselves into their jobs, to work long hours, and to follow instructions to the letter (Lasch, 1984: 27).

Note that Bell situates this cultural contradiction in *advanced* capitalist societies, a point with which Baudrillard (1998) would readily agree. However, unlike Bell, Baudrillard does not regard consumer culture as a contradiction of work culture, but argues instead that consumer culture is a logical expansion of the industrial disciplining of the masses. According to Baudrillard,

> the current training in systematic, organized consumption is *the equivalent and extension, in the twentieth century, of the great nineteenth-century-long process of the training of rural populations for industrial work.* . . . The industrial system, having socialized the masses as labour power, had much further to go to complete its own project and socialize them (that is, control them) as consumption power (original emphasis, 1998: 82)."

From Baudrillard's perspective, the most salient feature of consumer culture is an intensive process of mass socialization.

> The consumer society is also the society of learning how to consume, of social training in consumption. That is to say, there is a new and specific mode of *socialization* related to the emergence of

new productive forces (Ibid: 81).

The above passage indicates that the disciplining of the modern individual in contemporary capitalist society involves two major forms of socialization, both of which represent powerful productive forces that generate the work ethic on the one hand and consumer culture on the other. The insatiability of the modern consumer therefore cannot be seen to be a personal aberration, a character flaw, an abnormal personality trait. On the contrary, it is a socialized productive force. The insatiable character of the modern consumer is precisely how the modern individual is socialized to be: always dissatisfied, always hungry for more and more goods and services.

3.3.1 The Socialized Demand for Immediate Gratification

In so far as consumer insatiability reflects the socialization of the modern individual to become a consumer, it cannot be regarded to be a character flaw in the way self-indulgence can. The implied normative dimension in the phrase 'self-indulgence' is absent in so far as immediate gratification is positively sanctioned in consumer society. Agency cannot be attributed to the individual if immediate gratification is the expected behavioral response to a wide range of goods and services. Consider the sign posted under the logo of a road side Dairy Queen[40]: "Keep Screaming until

Mommy stops the car". The sign exemplifies the socialization process through which children are systematically trained to demand immediate gratification. The demand for immediate gratification is thus the norm in consumer society and not the exception to the social rule of self-restraint that self-indulgence implies.

The insatiability of the modern consumer can therefore be distinguished from ordinary self-indulgence. Whereas consumer insatiability represents an intensively conditioned norm that serves a vital function in contemporary society, self-indulgence denotes a character flaw in the individual involving behavior that elicits social disapproval. The insatiability of the modern consumer does not necessarily represent a character flaw nor does it necessarily involve behavior that elicits social disapproval. The important point is that the insatiability of the modern consumer is an essential component of the late modern capitalist system of production (Galbraith, 1967). In *The New Industrial State,* John Kenneth Galbraith argues that control of consumer demand became a pressing concern for the 'captains of industry' in the United States at the end of the Second World War. At the helm of a highly efficient system of production, American capitalists found that in order to maintain the high productive capacity of the system, a major challenge was how to dispense with the product. The most pressing concern was no longer exercising control over the worker but exercising control over the consumer. For the first time then the 'captains of industry' turned their attention to the consumer, who heretofore was left alone to decide whether to purchase a commodity, and directed a massive infusion of capital at the control of consumer demand through advertising, market research, and so forth (Baudrillard, 1998).

The emergence of consumer society can be situated at this point at which a massive infusion of capital was first directed toward the costly socialization process through which the mass media socially engineer modern individuals to be consumers. The cultural climate changed dramatically in that consumer society sanctions both the attitude and behavior of the insatiable consumer[41]. In view of this cultural transformation the insatiability of the modern consumer cannot be regarded as just self-indulgence. The child that screams until its mother stops the car and buys it an ice cream cone has not only been deliberately socialized to behave as it does. More significantly, its attitude has also been socialized: the child assumes it has the right to demand instant gratification. This dissertation proceeds from the understanding that consumerism refers to a mass socialization process that trains modern individuals to serve a vital function in advanced capitalist societies as insatiable consumers.

3.3.2 Consumer Socialization & the *Tanha* Model

The *tanha* model accentuates certain salient features of consumer socialization. As discussed earlier, the socialization process through which modern individuals are inculcated in consumer culture is not predicated on objects but on fantasy. Campbell has (1987) argued that creative imagination is the medium for regulating the consumer's appetite for goods and services. The practices of fantasy and daydream rather than the practice of sensual gratification takes precedence in the mass socialization process. Baudrillard (1996) takes a similar stance in arguing that it is not objects that are consumed but information, and contending that consumption is not a material practice. Paradoxically then, in so-called modern *materialism* the locus of consumption is actually the *mind* and not commodified goods and services. Christopher Lasch (1984) has also proposed a similar critique of consumerism in asserting that indulgence in fantasy a more appropriate representation of modern consumption than indulgence in a commodities.

> It is misleading to characterize the culture of consumption as a culture dominated by things. The consumer lives surrounded not so much by things as by fantasies. He lives in a world that has no objective or independent existence and seems to exist only to gratify or thwart his desires. (Lasch, 1984: 30)

The socialized practice of fantasizing is another way of saying that the general tendency of the mass socialization process in consumer culture is to draw the modern individual's attention away from reality. Accordingly, the insatiable consumer is not simply engaged in self-indulgent behavior but is actively withdrawing from social reality.

Following in this track, the *tanha* model directs our attention to a second, related, feature of the consumer socialization process. It may be recalled that from Baudrillard's perspective two aspects of consumer culture are inseparable: the 'murder of reality' and the 'death of the social'. The modern individual is socialized not only to engage in the practice of fantasy but also to avoid social relationship. In other words, consumers are socialized to ignore everyday life: to ignore the lifeworld that is the basis of social reality and to ignore their ordinary everyday social relationships. The 'murder' of reality is inseparable from the 'death of the social' because social reality is predicated on social relationship, therefore the erosion of social relationship entails the loss of reality. Furthermore, identity is also predicated on social relationship therefore the 'death of the social' also probelmatizes identity formation. The features of consumer socialization that the *tanha* model accentuates will be illustrated through excerpts taken from the interview data collected in the field study.

3.3.3 The Field Study: A Site of Resistance

The field data also illustrates various ways in which modern Buddhist *praxis* represents a form of resistance to consumer conditioning. The *tanha* model illuminates the data in this regard by providing a useful frame of reference for interpreting the points of resistance in the interface between the socialization of modern individuals in consumer society and their re-socialization within a religious community. Whereas self-indulgence appears to have little relevance to the sociological critique of consumption at the macro-sociological level analysis, the issue of self-indulgence is highly relevant when it is used with reference to the moral worldview of a specific community. The notion of self-indulgence raises some inevitable questions. What threshold separates self-indulgence from ordinary enjoyment? What determines whether ordinary enjoyment itself constitutes self-indulgence?

The threshold for what constitutes indulgence depends, to some extent, on the moral worldview of a particular community. Self-indulgence therefore implies a moral community that adheres to a standard for ascertaining the appropriateness or inappropriateness of personal conduct. It also implies a moral worldview that is the basis of that community's social reality. If consumerism erodes both community and reality, as the preceding discussion suggests it does, then how are modern individuals within the broader context of consumer society to ascertain to whether their consumption habits constitute self-indulgence? There is no generic standard, apparently. What constitutes self-indulgence depends on the particular moral worldview of a specific human community. It follows then that resistance to consumer socialization can be expected to appear in communities whose worldview valorizes countervailing forms of self-restraint. The field research was carried out in one such community.

While self-restraint was generally valued at the Buddhist monastery and meditation centre in question, explicit forms of restraint were required in particular activities where such self-restraint is not ordinarily expected. For example, watching television was not allowed and there was no television set on the centre grounds. Although watching too much television is ordinarily regarded with disapproval and perhaps concern for the T.V. 'addict', not to watch television at all is unthinkable for most modern individuals. The threshold of what constitutes self-indulgence in this case is particularly relevant to the question of modern consumption.

Within the context of the Buddhist community, the renunciation of television crisply conveys the interface between modern Buddhist *praxis* and consumer culture. Refraining from television spectatorship pertains directly to consumer socialization since television is especially significant therein. Galbraith noted over thirty years ago that "radio and more especially television [had] become the prime instruments for the management of consumer demand" (1967: 208). Renouncing thereby constitutes an act of resistance against the social engineering of the modern consumer to which Galbraith alludes.

More recently, Dunn (1998) has proposed that television itself can be perceived as a form of commodity by framing television-viewing as a consumption relationship in which viewers *consume visual representations* (original emphasis: 71). The effects of television as a commodity form on the television viewer is particularly instructive in regard to social relationship.

> Television presupposes an isolated viewer/consumer; viewing presupposes a certain withdrawal from the contexts of social interaction. Television spectatorship, then, can be thought of as a socially disengaged experience of a simulated, ongoing, and highly fragmented world of visual images. While television viewers often watch with others, the *act* of viewing necessitates disengagement from social interaction for an immersion in a fabricated world of visual stimuli. Furthermore...the decision to watch often comes from a decision for pleasurable distractions that enable the viewer to escape from self and other.

The practice of watching television contrasts sharply with the practice of observing the mind, that is, with the meditation practice which is the central activity around which the Buddhist community had organized itself. The data suggest that when individuals meditate, the focus of their attention often centers on their recent interactions with other people. In many of the case histories that will be discussed below, the interviewee describes his or her critical contemplation of social relationship while sitting in meditation.

In one of these narratives, a professional woman describes how she resolved the problematic relationship with her emotionally abusive husband and the troubled early childhood relationship with her physically abusive mother. Her meditation practice exhibited a careful and sober consideration of these intimate relationships. It is precisely this kind of attention to social relationship that is pre-empted by the practice of television spectatorship. Since television is a convenient form of escape through which social relationships, particularly problematic ones, can be ignored, the Buddhist community's ban on television spectatorship effectively eliminated the social isolation process fostered by the practice of T.V. watching. Dunn links this social erosion, the atomizing effect television tends to have on the viewer, to the loss of reality.

> The "escapist" character of television viewing is inseparable from the [fantasyland] nature of the televisual world itself. While in various ways making claims to "reality," television in fact constitutes only ready-made representations, substituting for real social relations their artificial construction as images. (74)

In another of the case histories that appears below, an elderly woman speaks of the deteriorating relationship with her husband who she eventually divorced, much to his dismay. Her narrative portrays a husband watching television, oblivious to the plight of his wife who has developed an ulcer due to the coercive nature of the relationship. Dunn fruitfully connects the loss of social relationship and loss of reality to the issue of identity formation.

> The nonsocial relational character of the television viewing experience symbolizes . . . the isolation and fragmentation of the self in consumption relations. . . If the capacity for self-definition is by its nature social relational, dependent on the concrete encounters of group life, we might expect [television spectatorship] to impede or undermine identity-forming processes [in so far as watching television] displaces viewers from socially formative processes of interaction. (75)

Excerpts from the case histories will also demonstrate the socially formative process of identity formation that occurs within the context of the Buddhist community. In the previous case, to continue with that example, the narrative describes how the interviewee evolved a new identity through the social network she developed within the Buddhist community and a nearby yoga community and how, by virtue of the stronger, less dependent sense of herself, she was able to extricate herself from her marital destructive relationship.

The renunciation of television spectatorship demonstrates one point of resistance to consumer socialization in the interface between modern Buddhist *praxis* and consumer society. The field data also contain narratives in which participants describe their struggle with alcoholism or heroin addiction, some having undertaken the 12 Step Program through

Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. A few excerpts from some of these narratives appear below, as well as from the interview with a thirty year old man who had attended his first meditation retreat who was not an alcoholic or drug addict but nonetheless *felt* as if he were an addict in regard to women, cigarettes, marijuana, food, and so on. The effort by modern individuals to regain self-control in face of their addictions is another point of resistance to consumer socialization exhibited at the centre. The term, 'self-indulgence' typically refers to behavior that is usually not perceived as indulgence but as addiction, a general tendency that is alluded to in everyday expressions like "sex addict," "food addict," "caffeine addict," "nicotine addict," and so on. Regardless of how such behaviors are perceived, the intensive socialization of the modern consumer creates a cultural climate that fosters rather than constrains addictive type behavior patterns. While consumer society may be linked to personality problems in which addictive type behavior is characteristic, the *tanha* model of consumption identifies the deeper pathological implications of the socialization of the insatiable consumer: the 'murder' of reality, the 'death' of the social, the problem of personal identity. It is in with reference to these features of the intensive socialization process that the explication of modern Buddhist *praxis* will be undertaken. Before broaching the subject of Buddhist *praxis*, however, we must first consider the concept*praxis* , to which we now turn.

Chapter Four: The Concept of Praxis

Marx, Nietzsche, & Theravada Buddhism

4.1 The Concept of *Praxis* in Marx's Theory

The *tanha* model may be a useful way to frame consumption, but it does not indicate the limits of consumerism. It is now possible to identify the boundary of market consumption by identifying tendencies within Buddhist *praxis* that run counter to the socialization of the insatiable consumer. In this chapter Buddhist *praxis* will be defined after a preliminary consideration of Marx's concept of *praxis* and the Aristotelian distinction between *praxis* and *theoria* that informs Nietzsche's criticism of modern philosophy. We begin then with Marx's theory in which *praxis* has three different connotations[42]: anthropological, reflexive, and revolutionary.

In terms of Marx's philosophical anthropology, human nature is determined by human activity, or *praxis*, such that "the very nature or character of a man is determined by what he does or his *praxis*, and his products are concrete embodiments of this activity" (Bernstein, 1971: 44). Human *praxis* refers here not only to man's activity but also to man's consciousness in relation to his activity.

The second, *reflexive praxis*, refers to "relentless criticism of all existing conditions' in order to 'find the new world through criticism of the old" (Marx, Ibid: 44). In this case *praxis*, as reflexive critique, aims to reform consciousness "through analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself, whether in religion or politics" (Ibid). While the first type of praxis involves what man is doing and man's consciousness about what he is doing, the second type of *praxis* involves the reflexivity of consciousness: consciousness becoming aware of itself.

The third type of *praxis* Marx discusses is 'revolutionary practice' in which reflexive critique becomes a material force. Critique becomes a material force once it has 'gripped the masses' through a radical critique that reveals to the masses a critical understanding of their suffering. The masses Marx had in mind, of course, refers to the proletariat. Marx held out the hope that the Germans would emancipate themselves once "philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, [and] the proletariat finds its *intellectual* weapons in philosophy" (Ibid, 54). It is through this union of intellectuals and proletariat that 'practical-critical' activity becomes 'revolutionary practice'.

Whereas for Hegel the task of philosophy is to interpret the world, for Marx the task of philosophy is to change the world. The *anthropological* sense of *praxis*, in which a man's consciousness is determined by what he does, is distinct from the *reflexive* sense of *praxis* whereby, through radical critique man's consciousness becomes aware of itself. In the first case, activity is the material basis for consciousness. In the second case, consciousness transforms itself. What is particularly noteworthy is the relation between the first and third types of *praxis*. The *anthropological* sense of *praxis* represents the reverse order of the *revolutionary* sense of *praxis* in which reformed consciousness determines revolutionary action. In other words, consciousness generates action (theory becomes a material force).

For Marx it is through productive activity that man realizes his full human potential, what Marx calls man's "species-being". Whatever separates man from the productive activity of his species-being, such as dehumanizing assembly-line work, is an obstacle to human freedom. Dehumanizing activity is the material basis for man's alienated consciousness. Man becomes alienated from the object of his labour, that object being his congealed *praxis*; he becomes alienated from others, since the essence of man is "in its actuality the ensemble of social relationships" (Ibid); and he becomes alienated from himself, since it is through productive activity that man realizes his true nature. The task of revolutionary *praxis* is to reform alienated consciousness. The goal of the intellectual's *praxis*, the relentless radical critique of social institutions, is to change the social world through the reformation of the alienated consciousness that issues from de-humanizing labour.

Whereas the agent of revolution is the proletariat, the obstacle to revolution is the proletariat's alienated, or 'false', consciousness. The role of the intellectual is to transform mass consciousness through a radical critique of the mass's existential conditions. Buddhist *praxis* is similar to Marx's view of revolutionary *praxis* in so far as the rigorous investigation of one's body and mind in Theravada meditation practice involves a relentless radical critique of existential conditions. As well, a radical transformation of consciousness is also the aim of Buddhist meditation. The difference is that Buddhist *praxis* aims at psychological revolution not social revolution. Although it will be argued below that the psychological revolution in question also entails a social revolution in the lifeworld, social transformation is secondary to the individual's freedom (enlightenment) whereas, for Marx, the order is reversed: social revolution is the condition for the individual's freedom.

4.2 Aristotle's Concepts of *Praxis* and *Theoria*

Buddhist *praxis* is also congruent with Marx's *praxis* on the understanding that one's activity affects one's consciousness. It is on this understanding that the prescribed code of conduct, the Buddhist precepts, constitutes the basis for the investigation of consciousness. In contrast, Marx's concept of revolutionary *praxis* does not specify a code of conduct. Marx is not alone in failing to link modern philosophy with the question of how to live one's daily life under the prevailing conditions of contemporary society. Nietzsche claims this deficiency characterizes modern philosophy itself, and vehemently denounces this feature of modern philosophy.

> [In modern society] philosophy remains the learned monologue of the lonely stroller, the accidental loot of the individual, the secret skeleton in the closet, or the harmless chatter between senile academics and children. No one may venture to fulfil philosophy's law within his own person, no one may live philosophically with that simple loyalty which compelled an ancient, no matter where he was or what he was doing, to deport himself as a Stoic if he once had pledged faith to the Stoa. All modern philosophizing is political, policed by governments, churches, academies, custom, fashion, and human cowardice, all of which limit it to a fake learnedness. (Nietzsche, quoted in Howey 1973: 33).

Aristotle's concept of *praxis* is crucial for making sense of Nietzsche's stance toward modern philosophy.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *praxis* as "the practical application or exercise of a branch of learning" (Morris, 1981: 1029). To the ancient Greeks, *praxis* denoted "action" or "doing". For Aristotle *praxis* refers more specifically to living well, that is, to living an ethical life[43] (Bernstein, 1971). He contrasted *praxis* to *theoria*, or wisdom, because its aim is "not *knowing* or wisdom for its own sake, but *doing*—living well" (Ibid: x, emphasis added). Importantly, Aristotle did not dichotomize *theoria* and *praxis*. While serving different functions, *theoria* and *praxis* do not indicate different ways of life for Aristotle (as does the dichotomy between theory and practice within modern philosophy) but together indicate "two dimensions of the truly human and free life" (Ibid). Disciplines requiring knowledge and practical wisdom (*praxis*) complement and are complemented by activities concerned with knowledge for its own sake (*theoria*). What we now call 'practical' therefore has little to do with what Aristotle intended by *praxis*. The English translation of *praxis* as 'practice' and 'practical' evokes the stereotype of the practical man — unconcerned with theory but interested in the 'practical' or 'material' things of life — contrasted against the impractical 'ivory tower' intellectual epitomized by the modern philosopher. This antinomy between theory and practice in modern philosophy, however, is absent in the Aristitotelian sense of *praxis*.

The ancient philosopher is perhaps most distinct from the modern philosopher to the extent that modern philosophy cannot warrant the same social respect. Nietzsche's scorn for the 'fake learnedness of the modern philosopher' no doubt gives voice to the widespread contempt for intellectuals in modern society. However, Nietzsche's contempt for modern philosophy is also consistent with his vehement attack on modern Christianity.

> Against Christianity, Nietzsche repeats the largely justified charge which has been raised in the Far East ever since the Thirteenth century: that Christians do not practice what they preach, no matter what their holy books say. As Nietzsche puts it, 'A Buddhist acts differently from a non-Buddhist; a Christian acts like everybody else and practices a Christianity of moods and rituals.' (Jaspers, quoted in Howey, 1973: 29-30).

In citing the Buddhist as a cultural foil, Nietzsche follows a long line of western thinkers from the onset of modernity, including Pascal and Voltaire, in using an idealized image of the East as a rhetorical device to critique Western culture (Clarke, 1997)[44]. Sincere Christians had no problem with Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity (Kaufmann, 1968). Nietzsche's stance against Christianity must be understood not as an attack on Christian *praxis* but on the abandonment of Christian *praxis*. It is the *Sunday* Christian that Nietzsche denounces, not the *sincere* practicing Christians who were fading into extinction. A practicing Christian does not act just like everybody else, according to Nietzsche. In proclaiming himself an anti-Christ, Nietzsche was attacking the teachings of Paul, not those of Jesus, because "Paul substituted faith in Christ for the Christlike life" (Ibid: 345); that is, for Christian *praxis*.

> The 'justification by faith' seems to Nietzsche an inversion of Jesus's evangel. He never tires of insisting that the legacy of Jesus was a practice, and he is convinced—presumably by Dostoevsky—that even *such* a life is possible, for *certain* human beings even necessary: genuine original Christianity will be possible at all times. The Christian religion, however, seems to him to be founded on Paul's denial of this proposition—a denial that Nietzsche would explain by saying that for *him* [Paul] such a life was not possible. Nor was it possible for St. Augustine, Luther, or Calvin. Paul is for Nietzsche *'the first Christian'*, the discoverer of faith as a remedy against the incapacity for what one deems to be right action; the man who made it possible for pagans the world over to persist in their own way of life while calling themselves Christians. Without Paul there would be no Christendom (Ibid: 343-344; original emphasis).

Nietzsche's attack against modern philosophy for its lack of philosophic *praxis* sustains the same argument as his attack against modern Christianity for its lack of Christian *praxis.* Nihilism is the real issue that concerns Nietzsche here. Nietzsche was centrally concerned with nihilism, both in his philosophy and in his life, because he regarded it to be a great threat to western civilization (Schacht, 1995). The gap between *praxis* and *theoria* opens the door for the menace that Nietzsche referred to as pathological nihilism (Ibid). The narrative of a participant in the field study illustrates the danger of pathological nihilism, the social consequence of the gap between theory and practice. In this case the loss of Christian *praxis* entails and its replacement by the bourgeois respectability of Sunday Christians indicates a loss of social control. The middle-aged subject described his decision as a teenager to stop going to church.

> There were people who, on Sunday morning, were criticizing me for having long hair, and an ear ring, things like that. And you know, the night before, they were at the little local clubs chasing each other's wives and husbands. It's a very small town. You hear all that stuff. You get drunk. I used to always think, 'There's something wrong with religion. With this religion.' Later on, I thought there was something wrong with religion in general. (Interview #27)

The subject's rejection of religion immediately preceded his long-term involvement with substance abuse, launching the turbulent years of his youth in which he described himself as a "hard-drinking, hard-fighting, whore-chasing King dirt bag." The loss of moral authority resulting from the gap between Christian *theoria* and Christian *praxis* in this case history illustrates the cultural crisis Nietzsche anticipated as a consequence of what he called the 'death of God'. The threat to civilization, for Nietzsche, was that nihilism would open the gate to a new barbarism unprecedented in its savagery and massive in its scope (Kaufmann, 1968).

> How much must collapse now that this faith [in God] has been undermined because it was built on this faith....This plentitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm that is now impending—who could guess enough of it today to be compelled to play...the prophet of a gloom and eclipse of the sun whose like has probably never yet occurred on earth (Nietzsche, quoted in Gillespie, 1995: xi-xii).

4.3 The Three Aspects of Buddhist Praxis

The complementarity of *theoria* and *praxis* in Aristotle's philosophy provides the context then for understanding the relation between Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist practice, neither of which has much meaning without reference to the other. Apparently modern Buddhism faces the same fate that has befallen modern Christianity and modern philosophy. The late Thai monk, Achan Chah, lamented that Buddhism has sunk about as low as it can go in Thailand because the monasteries are mostly full of 'scholar' monks who have little or nothing to do with Buddhist practice (1992a: 21). However, when Buddhist teachings and Buddhist praxis are not divided into the sterile opposition between theory and practice, they refresh and reinforce each other. *Theoria* in this case refers to self-knowledge, that is, knowledge as lived experience. In contrast to the assumption of knowledge as some 'thing' that can be passed out like a press kit, Buddhist practice involves the view of knowledge as a living process that constitutes critical self-reflection. The Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa (1989) has eloquently described this non-reified view of knowledge.

> Knowledge is not handed down like an antique...The teachings are always up to date. They are not 'ancient wisdom,' an old legend. The teachings are not passed along as information, handed down as a grandfather tells traditional folk tales to his grandchildren. It does not work that way. It is a real experience. There is a saying in the Tibetan scriptures: 'Knowledge must be burned, hammered and beaten like pure gold. Then one can wear it as an ornament.' So...you do not take [the teachings] uncritically, but you burn it, you hammer it, you beat it, until the bright, dignified colour of gold appears. Then you craft it into an ornament, whatever design you like, and you put it on. Therefore [the teaching] has a living quality. You are not trying to become a replica of your teacher. The teachings are an individual personal experience. (Ibid: 8)

The distinction between Buddhist *theoria* and Buddhist *praxis* will be used in this study to distinguish what consumerism is from what it is not. In formulating a definition of consumption in the last chapter, the Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha*) was selected because the understanding of desire is central to Buddhist *praxis*. The definition of consumption as *tanha* draws on Buddhist *theoria*. In contrast, the reflexive relationship to the existential experience of desire, to desire as it actually occurs in everyday life, will draw on Buddhist *praxis*. The Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha)* was used to define what consumption refers to, Buddhist *praxis* will now be used to specify practices that are excluded from the field of consumerism and are contrary to the practices characterizing the insatiable consumer. The task then is to identify specific Buddhist practices that run counter to the socialization of the insatiable consumer.

Buddhist praxis involves a moment-to-moment reflection on the movement of desire. The relationship between praxis and desire is immediate, direct, and intimate. Immediate, because desire as it operates in the present moment is the focus of attention. Direct, because it is through direct observation and not intellectual analysis that the movement of desire is investigated. Intimate, because the observer is not assumed to exist apart from that which is being observed. It is simply the mind being aware of its own movement. The fact that the mind can reflect on its own movement implies that there is no 'subject' of self-reflection involved in Buddhist *praxis*, in contrast to the 'subject' of practical reason in Kantian ethics. It is this reflexive capacity of the mind that is the liberating factor in Buddhist practice. Buddhist self-reflection consists of three inter-related components: self-restraint (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*), *and* self-critique (*sati-panna*). We will now take up each of these in turn.

4.3.1 Self-Restraint

Buddhist praxis is based on voluntary self-restraint or *sila*. *Sila* is referred to as 'right action' in Buddhism. For the practicing Buddhist, *sila* means voluntary adherence to the Buddhist precepts. It is in this sense that Buddhism is a life order, that is, a way you order your life (Weber, 1958). The five basic Buddhist precepts are to refrain from killing, stealing, wrong speech, sexual misconduct, taking intoxicants. Voluntary self-restraint is not an imperative for the modern consumer (Baudrillard, 1998). On the contrary, the imperative is self-indulgence, as implied in Campbell's theory of consumption as modern hedonism. 'Why *should* one restrain oneself?' is not a question that concerns the insatiable consumer. The practice of self-restraint therefore falls outside the circle of market consumption, and runs counter to consumerism .

4.3.2 Strength of Mind

Concentration exercises are a basic training for developing strength of mind (*samadhi*). Exercising the mind is comparable to physical exercise, the difference being that to exercise the body requires putting it into motion, whereas "to exercise the mind means bringing it to rest" (Chah, 1994: 1). Just as athletic training develops physical strength, concentration develops strength of mind by keeping attention focused on the breath or other bodily sensations. Direct awareness of the body is the existential anchor in Buddhist meditation practice. Buddhist praxis involves being aware of the body just as an athlete is aware of how food, exercise, and environment affect performance. In contrast, insatiable consumption engenders alienation from the body; the practices of fantasy and daydream obstruct direct awareness of the body, as does the impression management involved in striving for social prestige or social difference. Training the mind to concentrate directly on the body and to be aware of one's immediate physiological condition is therefore a practice that generally falls outside the orbit of consumption.

4.3.3 Self-Critique

The third aspect of Buddhist *praxis* (*sati-panna*) consists of two inter-related components: mindfulness (*sati*) and discriminative wisdom (*paṇna*) (Nanasampano, 1995b). Mindfulness involves a close and careful observation of body and mind referred to as "bare attention" (Nyanaponika, 1969: 30): that is, not thinking about but being directly aware of whatever arises in body and mind. Discriminative wisdom involves the critical investigation of that which is thus observed.

(1) *Mindful Observation* (*sati*) In its empirical investigation of the movement of desire, Buddhist *praxis* differs from western empiricism since there are not five senses in Buddhism but six. The mind is also considered to be a sense base, as previously mentioned, so that, just as visual objects are directly observed by the eye, mental objects can directly be observed by the mind. The mind can be aware of its own movement, for example, by noting whether it is fantasizing or daydreaming. It is not *strength* of mind in this case that is the aim of practice but *presence* of mind: to observe what occurs in body or mind, without comment, criticism, or judgement, without any attempt to try and change it in any way or to steer the mind in any direction .

The practice of mindful attention (*sati*) therefore involves a "choiceless awareness" of what is happening right now (Ibid; Goldstein, 1983). In contrast to the hedonistic habit of mind to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, mindful observation falls outside the orbit of modern hedonism since consumption does not involve the practice of observing the mind.

What consumerism involves is the bombardment of the mind by literally thousands of exposures to advertising every day (Jacobson & Mazur, 1995), a socialization process that promotes fantasy.

(2) *Self-Investigation*[45] (*panna*) The second component of self-critique (*panna*), which is translated as discriminative wisdom (Sumedho, 1992), involves investigation of the self, that is, of body and mind. To investigate what arises in the body or mind is to find out the conditions that caused it to arise. Whereas Marx's revolutionary *praxis* constitutes a relentless critique of social institutions in order to reveal the proletariat's true existential circumstances, Buddhist *praxis* constitutes a relentless critique of one's own existential circumstances. Self-critique investigates habits and tendencies of mind and body that lead to suffering until the existential conditions surrounding their arising and passing away reveal themselves. If insatiable consumption promotes self-absorption (Lasch, 1979) rather than self-critique, then Buddhist practice of self-investigation runs counter to market consumption. To summarize, the above Buddhist practices can be subsumed under the general heading of critical self-reflection.

4.4 Exploratory Study of a Buddhist Monastery & Meditation Center

An exploratory field study was undertaken to examine the relation, as lived experience, between Buddhist praxis and theoria among North

Americans. Westerners engaged in Buddhist practice therefore constituted the target population. The object was to ascertain 1) how Westerners engaged in Buddhist practice made sense of their engagement, and 2) the consequences of that engagement for their everyday lives, particularly in terms of lifestyle and personal relations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, one-on-one, to gather this data. A participant's life history is the unit of analysis. The relation between Buddhist practice and theoria was explored in the chronological sequence of events in the life history centered on each subject's encounter with Buddhist practice: Each subject gave a brief auto-biography leading up to their encounter with Buddhist practice, described the encounter, and then related what took place in their lives following it. Subjects were informed of the purpose of the study prior to the interview. In addition, a public notice was displayed at the center (see Box 2) accompanied by a more detailed document that explicitly described the research. The interviews were generally an hour long, and were usually conducted in the center library, although some were conducted outdoors during pleasant weather.

Public Notice

The data from this exploratory study is not being used to make claims about the population of Westerners engaged in Buddhist practice. The data were used instead to explore how modern individuals actually engage in Buddhist meditation as subjective culture. Excerpts from sixteen of the interviews will be used to illustrate modern Buddhist practice as the lived experience of North American practitioners. The authoritative sources that have been drawn on in this thesis come from a number of meditation manuals written by both Western and Asian monks (Sumedho, 1987; Gunaratana, 1991) and lay teachers (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987) of the Theravada tradition. My primary source is the work of the late Achan Chah (1917-1992), the founding Thai monk of Wat Pah Pong forest monastery in Thailand which has over a hundred branch monasteries worldwide (1994: 95-97). Many Westerners have ordained as monks under Achan Chah (some of whom have gone on to establish Theravadin monasteries in the West) whose work represents the most concise and straight-forward description of Theravada practice I have encountered in the literature.

For the discussion of Buddhist *praxis* that follows, the only data I will draw on from the field research are the life-histories. The life-histories that have been selected from the interview data most clearly illustrate particular aspects of Buddhist *praxis* under discussion. Although excerpts from other narratives could have been selected, only a few were selected to quote from at length to illustrate the life history process that changed over time in certain individuals as a result of their contact with Buddhist *praxis.* The selected narratives represent recurring themes in the data as a whole.

4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The following information is presented to contextualize the field setting and certain characteristics of the individuals who participated in the study. The field research was an exploratory study of a single Buddhist meditation center in North America in which an effort was made to interview members from each of the three main social categories at the center: residents (monastics and lay people), retreatants, and visitors.

Residents On average, about ten residents lived at the center at any one time, including monks, nuns, and lay people. Almost all residents were interviewed, three of them more than once. Two monks and a nun, all Western, were among these subjects.

Retreatants Throughout the year the center holds meditation retreats of varying lengths from weekend retreats to 10-day retreats. Retreatants generally arrive the day of the retreat and leave the day after it finishes.

There were two ten day retreats over the period of research, and interviews were conducted with retreatants from both.

Visitors Hailing from as far away as Asia and Australia, a cosmopolitan flow of visitors streamed steadily through the center, staying from a few hours to a few weeks or longer. Closer to home, many Asian-Americans (Thai, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese) frequently brought food offerings (*dana*) for the monks. Western friends of the center also dropped by regularly, usually to be with the monks by working with them on center projects. Board members also came by on occasion to attend board meetings or to be at the center.

Gender, Race, & Marital Status

Over half the sample is male (60%), and 85% of it is Western (as opposed to Asian). Six Asians were interviewed. The gender ratio here reflects the general imbalance where males outnumber females at the center both during retreats and also during the regular schedule. There were less married participants (40%) in the sample than those who were either single or divorced (60%). The majority of single participants were male (79%); the majority of divorced, female (78%) (See Table 1).

Gender		Race		Marital Status		
Male	Female	Asian	Caucasian	Single	Married	Divorced
60%	40%	15%	85%	35%	40%	25%
24	16	6	34	14	17	9

Table 1. *The Distribution of Gender, Race, Marital Status Among Subjects.* The bottom row of the table lists number of participants in each category. N = 40.

Age & Education

In terms of age, 90% of those interviewed were over 25. The average age is about 45 with 35% of the subjects over 55. More specifically, 55% of the subjects were between 35 and 54 years old, 20% between 55 and 64, and 15% between 65 and 74. In terms of educational attainment, only few subjects were from the working class. Approximately 60% of those interviewed had an undergraduate degree or higher. About 20% had either an MA or a PhD, 25% had either a BA or a BSc, and about 18% had a professional degree in law, medicine, or engineering. In the remainder of the subjects, the two youngest participants were undergraduates, one a third year sociology student; 22% had certification from either art/technical school or community college. Finally, 10% had high school only. Of the four subjects listed as high school only, two were elderly married women that were clearly not working class (one was an upper class Asian). They were included in this category because neither explicitly mentioned any further educational attainment. The other two participants in this category were working class (see Figure 3 below).

EDUCATION

15-24	X X (2)
25-34	X X (2)
35-44	X X X X X X X X X X (10)
45-54	X X X X X X X X X X X X (12)
55-64	X X X X X X X X (8)
65-74	X X X X X X (6)

AGE

High School	X X X X (4)
College	X X X X X X (6)
Undergrad	X X (2)
Art/Tech	X X X (3)
BA/Bsc	X X X X X X X X X X (10)
MA	X X (2)
PhD	X X X X X X (6)
Professional	X X X X X X X (7)

Figure 3. *Age Distribution & Level of Educational Attainment Among Subjects.* N = 40.

Chapter Five: Self-Restraint

The Foundation of Buddhist Praxis

5.1 The Gradual Training

In the last chapter, Buddhist *praxis* was defined as a process of critical self-reflection consisting of three domains of practice: self-restraint (*sila*), strength of mind (*samadhi*), and mindful self-critique (*sati-panna*). This chapter takes up the first component, *sila*, which alludes to a basic level of moral restraint which is the foundation of Buddhist *praxis* as well as to the more advanced level of self-restraint as an art of living. The chapter first elaborates on how the three domains of Buddhist *praxis* interrelate. Although the heart of Theravadin meditation practice is choiceless awareness of body and mind, the foundation of Buddhist *praxis* is self-restraint which in Buddhist *praxis* represents the practice of freedom, as it does in ancient Stoicism (Foucault, 1988).

Freedom in Buddhist practice refers to liberation from suffering. The Buddha taught for forty years and the complete collection of his teachings is vast[46]; however, he stated that he taught only four things which are known in Buddhism as the Four Noble Truths: the existence of suffering, its cause, the end of suffering, and the way leading to the end of suffering[47]. While the Four Noble Truths can be simply stated, they are by no means easy to grasp. Indeed, to fully understand them one would have to be fully enlightened (Sumedho, 1992b). The Four Noble Truths were not proclaimed as absolute truths to be blindly accepted but as something to be investigated for oneself, that is, to be understood existentially, if one is to be to free from suffering.

A participant in the study stressed that the Buddha did not proclaim the Four Noble Truths to the masses. This male subject, a Yale graduate with a scholarly knowledge of Theravada Buddhism, emphasized the point that an individual must first have established a basic moral foundation before being taught the Four Noble Truths, this basic level of self-restraint is referred to as the 'gradual training' in the Pali Canon.

> The Buddha said explicitly that he did not teach the Four Noble Truths to anyone until they had undergone this course of gradual training, because only at the end of it is your mind sufficiently concentrated and pliable to actually grasp these fairly difficult Truths. Because the Four Noble Truths are not simple. Now the gradual training is, to some extent, everything your grandmother told you to do: don't smoke, don't drink, live simply, and so forth on down the line. (Interview #21)

In other words, a basic code of moral conduct is a prerequisite to understand the Buddha's teaching. The line drawn by the gradual training grates against the socialization of the insatiable consumer which erodes self-restraint (Jacobson & Mazur, 1995: 13). A humorous example is the self-report by Insight meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein (1983) in which he describes himself eating cookies and gazing at the name on the box: 'Eat

Some More' cookies, which he proceeded to do. Market consumption operates as a cultural counterforce to the voluntary self-restraint required of Westerners engaged in Buddhist meditation. Consequently, as Engler[48] (1986) asserts, what typically happens when a Westerner encounters Buddhist meditation is that he does not undertake Buddhist practice as he might imagine. What he actually undertakes, in fact, is the gradual training. Given the powerful and ubiquitous force whereby modern individuals are socialized into being consumers (Baudrillard, 1998), doing 'everything your grandmother told you to do' might well be as far as most western practitioners will ever get. "People are kidding themselves," commented the Yale subject, "if they think they are going to have any major changes in the near future" (Ibid).

In regard to the interface between consumerism and Buddhist practice, the subject's remarks suggest that most western practitioners will probably not even complete the gradual training much less go beyond it. Although modern practitioners might imagine themselves to be engaged in Buddhist *praxis*, they are probably engaged in its prerequisite, the gradual training, and therefore lack the capacity to comprehend, much less realize, the Four Noble Truths. This subject's comments were not intended to disparage western practitioners but to soberly situate modern Buddhist *praxis*. It is probably an accurate assessment of most westerners who pass through the center. New religious movements are flooded with people that pass through after a brief stay (McGuire, 1997); the site of the field study was no exception.

5.2 Right Relationship

Why should one undertake the gradual training anyway? After all, who can really say what is good or bad? One response to the first question is that self-reflection verifies that your grandmother's advice is valid. Another male subject, a resident monk at the center, describes how self-reflection was the condition for legitimating the gradual training when he first began to meditate.

> It was a new perspective for me. Because you can recognize things in yourself that are a little heavy-handed. You know, that you come across a little crude, a little rude, a little abrupt with people. A lot of times when we do these things, we feel bad, not only the conscious but many of these things slip into the unconscious. And we have an over-riding sense of guilt that you can't shake off. And I would start meditating and feel like a weight being lifted off my shoulders, realizing that many of the things that I was doing, although I wasn't a bad person, were inappropriate at times with people. (Interview #23)

This narrative suggests that as lived experience the word 'enlightenment' refers not only to a clarity of vision but also the unburdening of a weight. The subject's 'new perspective' is grounded in concrete social relations, as is the 'weight being lifted off' his shoulders, that is, the 'burden' of inappropriate social interaction. This point is germane to the second question: Who can say what is good or bad? What is at issue here is moral tyranny: the modern individual's subjugation to social norms. The subject's narrative indicates that ethical conduct is not ultimately a matter of social norms but of self-knowledge.

On the one hand, the narrative demonstrates that critical self-reflection refers to an empirical investigation of one's actions[49], and not to an endless psychoanalysis or a narcissistic self-absorption. On the other hand, in contrast to the metaphysical Kantian subject that legislates moral imperatives, critical self-reflection entails close attention to each movement of body and mind that occurs in concrete on-going social relationship. 'Appropriate' conduct follows then from direct perception of one's actual circumstances. It is therefore neither external moral authority nor an internal moral subject but existential social inter-relationship that is the locus of the gradual training. The same subject just cited provided a vivid example.

> Drinking was never a problem with me. I was never an alcoholic or anything. But just due to the nature of being more free and loose when you do drink, and more verbal, you're apt to insult somebody sometimes. I had gone camping and this one person helped me buy a fishing rod and a fishing reel. And then I got upset because where we were fishing [it] was not very likely that we would catch any fish of any major size at all. We just wouldn't catch any fish. And we were drinking. Then after fishing and after the meal, I commented that it was hardly worth getting the rod. And then you look back on that and you say, 'Well, now that

> wasn't a good thing to say.' And so then I stopped drinking. That was the straw that broke the camel's back (Ibid).

Critical self-reflection was the condition for the 'straw' in this apparently trivial incident which occasioned a decisive transformation in this subject's way of being in the world. The moment the subject stopped to 'look back' on that social interaction, he encountered the Four Noble Truths as an existential fact. This narrative provides a good exemple of Simmel's concepts of objective and subjective culture: Buddhist *theoria* is the cultivating object through which the individual cultivated himself as a subject vis a vis the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth states suffering exists. In 'looking back' on himself, the subject observed a feeling of being ill at ease about his actions that issued directly from his social interactions. In Pali, this feeling of dis-ease is called *dukkha*, which is commonly translated as 'suffering'. The existence of *dukkha* is the basis for ethical conduct in Buddhism. The common translation of *dukkha* as 'suffering' is somewhat misleading since *dukkha* does not refer to the body where 'suffering' evokes images of physical pain—Christ being crucified, martyrs being tortured. *Dukkha* refers to the mind and is perhaps "best translated as dis-ease, general anxiety, or existential angst born of our experience as desiring creatures of the utter impermanence of the world (Dawson, 2001)." Consequently, freedom from *dukkha* does not mean freedom from physical pain, but rather freedom from existential angst. *Dukkha* has also been translated as 'unsatisfactoriness' is an appropriate description for this subject's self-reported inner state.

The Second Noble Truth states that suffering has a cause. Through direct perception of the feeling of dis-ease, the subject was clear about its cause. The Third Noble Truth states there is an end to suffering. With the seeing there is an ending: the subject's resolution to stop drinking was simultaneous with the direct perception of the cause of his feeling of dis-ease. The Fourth Noble Truth states that there is a way leading to the end of suffering. In this case, the subject contextualizes the incident within the path of practice upon which he had embarked.

> Many, many steps [like that of quitting alcohol]. Even the very small things that we consider doing that we drop, our other more heavy-handed ways of behavior, we just drop them by the side. We undertake a little finer method of acting with people. Once I started meditating, [I spent] less time in activities like playing pool and drinking beer and going out at night so much, and more [in] activities that would parallel the meditative framework (Interview #23).

The narrative illustrates how critical self-reflection runs counter to market consumption. The insatiable consumer in pursuit of emotional gratification virtually disappears through mindful observation. Similarly, reversing the unconscious avoidance of meaningless social relationship was the condition for establishing socially meaningful relations. The resolution to quit alcohol is consistent with the 'meditative framework' of self-reflection the subject had already embarked upon.

The gradual training is therefore founded upon the investigation of feeling (that is, the feeling of *dukkha)*. The question of right and wrong into which self-critique inquires is always a question of right relationship. The social fact is that we are always in relationship. It is the task of self-reflection to resolve the question of what is right relationship. In reflecting on what he was actually doing, the subject saw the existential validity of self-restraint: it promotes appropriate human relations. The subject's last sentence indicates that habits of heedless consumption come to an end through mindful investigation of the self. It is in this sense that critical self-reflection lies outside the circle of consumption.

How the subject felt about himself was the criterion for determining right relationship. Here Buddhist *praxis* is congruent with Romanticism's emphasis on the importance of feeling. However, the feeling of dis-ease issuing from his social relations is not a fabrication of the creative imagination. It is an existential fact. Moral agency did not spring from ideas or imagination but from direct perception of human suffering (*dukkha*). Transformation did not come through ideas or imagination but through a clear and distinct perception that is in itself transformative. Action did not follow from perception; the subject's decision to stop drinking coincided with his perception of alcohol as the source of feeling dis-ease about the 'things' he was doing that 'were inappropriate at times with people.' In illustrating the refusal of mindless market consumption through reflecting on its social consequences, the subject's narrative corroborates Baudrillard's view of consumption as the death of the social.

The Buddhist practitioner contrasts to the insatiable consumer in so far as Buddhist *praxis* is geared to peace of mind whereas modern hedonism generates perpetual dissatisfaction. Another subject in the study explicitly stated how a great deal of existential angst (*dukkha*) in his life was directly connected to the 'stupid indulgent' behavior that obstructed his peace of mind. Although familiar with Buddhism for a long time, the subject only entered the path of practice when he encountered the First Noble Truth as an existential fact. His narrative is a variation of the same theme discussed in the last narrative.

> I've known about meditation for probably over thirty years. But I've actually only practiced for the last maybe six or seven years. Something I knew about in theory. So it took me a long time to get started. But I was undergoing a lot of stress at home and on my job. And I knew that I had to meditate or I'd go insane. That I'd have a nervous breakdown. So finally I said to my wife that I have to come here. I have no choice but to come here. I guess the real reason I came here was because I needed peace of mind. And I think that's one of the first things a person experiences when they start meditating, is

> that they can gain this peace of mind. And then you can develop it from that point. (Interview #4).

This passage accentuates a vital point omitted in the previous narrative. The earlier narrative does not convey the understanding that it is peace of mind that galvanizes modern Buddhist *praxis*, which the above passage quite clearly suggests. However, it is not so much that peace of mind is gained but that confusion of mind is discarded. According to Buddhist doctrine, peace is the natural state of the mind, just as Rousseau and Kant regard freedom to be the ontological condition for human beings (Kelly, 1993). There is perhaps an elective affinity here since the peace of mind that results from meditation practice has in fact been described as the "taste of freedom" (Chah, 1994: 1). Freedom, in the Buddhist sense, is explicitly linked to the practice of voluntary self-restraint in this narrative: What the subject developed 'from that point' is the gradual training. Once again, a significant difference between the gradual training and consumption is the practice of critical self-reflection.

> I had been over-eating. Although I've never really been fat, I was about 15 pounds overweight. So I cut out meat, and I cut out the evening meal. And I lost that 15 pounds in about 8 weeks. And even though I continued that diet I didn't continue losing weight. And I've been that way ever since. [So it was] a matter of organizing my life, actually doing what I knew I had to do but never did. (Ibid)

The distinction between knowledge and self-knowledge reflects the modern dichotomy between theory and practice in the dead weight of the subject's knowledge about what he *should* be doing and how he *should* be living which was 'just something [he] knew in theory.' In contrast, the harmonization of *theoria* and *praxis* is reflected in the subject's discovery (through self-reflection) of the existential urgency for putting his life in order. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the subject could no longer deny that urgency; once he began the practice of self-reflection he was quick to act by virtue of an existential imperative. The subject was explicit in drawing the causal connections between mindless consumption, the disorder in his life, and peace of mind.

> And I did it suddenly. I mean I knew I had to do certain things. And I did it without question. Because I guess I knew deep down in the back of my mind that I had to do these things but I never did it. It was too easy: if I felt like having a drink, I'd have a drink, you know, alcoholic drink. Or if I was hungry, I'd stuff myself at night. Or eat a half gallon of ice cream. Or, you know, stupid indulgent things. So I knew that I had to clean up my life if I wanted to have some peace of mind. (Ibid)

Market consumption is easy precisely *because* it is mindless, that is, the insatiable consumer need not stop to consider its consequences. However, consumption's nihilistic consequences may well demand self-reflection. The subject's inability to escape from existential angst through consumption propelled him into the gradual training. Since voluntary self-restraint is the foundation of peace of mind, and peace of mind is foreign to the insatiable consumer, gradual training runs counter to the socialization of the insatiable consumer.

> My wife noticed that [meditation has] been a tremendous help for me. That I'm calmer, less emotional, and also reacting to things more reasonably and not impulsively. Being mindful before you act. In other words, applying the mindfulness that you learned in meditation to your everyday life. (Ibid)

In the last two narratives, the necessity for gradual training made itself clear to both subjects, who immediately discarded certain mindless habits of consumption when the existential imperative born of self-reflection demanded it. This existential imperative is embedded in social relationship with self-reflection as its catalyst, where the focal point for self-reflection and the gradual training is ordinary everyday life.

5.3 The Complementarity of the Three Aspects of Buddhist Praxis

Oddly enough in view of its importance, gradual training is not usually mentioned in the discourse of modern Buddhist practice. Westerners tend to conflate Buddhist practice with meditation, that is, with the practices of concentration (*samadhi*) and mindfulness (*sati*). Although meditation practice is essential, it is only one component of Buddhist *praxis*. Without the two other equally important components, self restraint (*sila)* and self-critique *(panna)*, meditation is as pointless as rowing a boat still tied to the dock. It does not go anywhere. It is not, in effect, Buddhist meditation since the absence of these two commonly overlooked components of Buddhist practice renders Buddhist meditation meaningless (Chah, 1992a).

This is an example of the devaluation of the highest values which is how Nietzsche defined nihilism (Schacht, 1995). It is therefore important to understand how the three components of Buddhist *praxis* operate together.

5.3.1 *Sila:* Right Action

Voluntary self-restraint denotes the first of the components, which is translated as 'morality' but is more accurate translated as 'right action' (Sumedho, 1992b). There are different levels of *sila*. At one level, which was described in the last narrative, *sila* refers to the basic self-restraint of gradual training, that 'matter of organizing my life' which is a prerequisite to Buddhist practice. Without a minimal degree of self restraint, a minimal degree of order in one's everyday life, the mind cannot attain the settled calm of *samadhi* during concentration meditation. Conversely, the more rigorous the self-restraint the deeper the calm. Practitioners who have not established this minimum level of *sila* are therefore 'kidding themselves,' as one subject implied earlier, if they imagine they are engaged in Buddhist practice.

5.3.2 *Samadhi:* Right Concentration.

Critical self-reflection is not effective without a minimal level of concentration, or 'access concentration' (Gunaratana, 1992). Just as a microscope is more effective than ordinary vision for investigating micro-organisms, the sharpness of *samadhi* is much more effective than the ordinary mind for critically investigating the self. In the same way that the gradual training embellishes concentration, a concentrated mind embellishes self-investigation. The common understanding is that the aim of meditation is tranquility. A calm mind is extolled in Buddhist practice; however, the purpose of achieving tranquility of mind is to investigate the self (Ibid). When the mind is calm and concentrated it can much more effectively investigate its own movements. *Samadhi* is therefore better thought of as strength of mind rather than as tranquility (Ibid).

5.3.3 *Sati-Panna*: Right Understanding

The power of *samadhi* provided the strength of mind that was the condition for the earlier subject's insight into appropriate conduct. Although usually translated as 'wisdom', *panna* may be more usefully translated as 'self-critique' since it involves investigating the question of right action in regard to one's conduct (Chah, 1996). Critical 'self-reflection' in this study refers to the investigation of no-self (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987). In Buddhist *praxis*, the assumption of an essential self is the fundamental attribution error because, according to Buddhist doctrine, there is no unchanging self. Whatever one identifies as one's 'self' is understood to be a case of mistaken identity. Furthermore the Buddha identified this belief in a permanent separate self is at the root of human suffering (Schumann, 1989). Importantly, as Sona (2000) has pointed out, it is not that we consciously *think* of ourselves as separate unchanging entities but that we *feel* that we are. Romanticism's emphasis on feeling is warranted within Buddhist *praxis*. However, the point is not to identify with feeling as one's 'true' self, as in Romanticism, but to shatter the unconscious assumption existentially experienced as the feeling of being a permanent unchanging being. Accordingly self-critique involves investigating the five components that constitute a person according to Theravada Buddhism: form (body); emotional feeling, perception, volition (will), and consciousness (mind) (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987; Trungpa, 1975) . *Panna* is the process of existential problem-solving that is the condition for insight into lifeworld conflict, an existential insight that 'takes a weight off' the mind, that is, which brings peace of mind. Whereas *sila* is the condition for calm, *sati-panna* is the condition for peace (Ibid).

Therefore two kinds of peace characterize Buddhist practice: the calm of *samadhi* and the peace of mind that comes about through *sati-panna* from insight. The distinction between a peaceful and a calm mind underscores the complementarity of the three aspects of practice: *sila, samadhi* and *panna*. The translation of the second type of meditation practice, mindful observation (*sati*), as 'insight meditation' denotes its close association to *panna*. It is not self-critique (*panna*) alone but its combination with mindfulness that leads to insight. Since it is a synergistic interaction between *sati* and *panna* that brings about insight, *sati* is a necessary condition for *panna*. Peace and tranquility are therefore two distinct goals in Buddhist practice.

5.3.4 *Sila* Reconsidered

Just as appropriate personal conduct (*sila*) fortifies strength of mind (*samadhi*), self-critique (*sati-panna*) fortifies appropriate conduct (*sila*). The peace of mind which results from resolving a lifeworld conflict—from insight—becomes the existential ground for voluntary self-restraint. Peace is presumed to be the natural state of the mind in Theravada Buddhism (Chah, 1996). Peace is understood to be the the ontological condition of a mind free from conflict. The aim of Buddhist practice is to 'purify' the mind of the confusions which obscure its natural state of peace. Hence the Buddhist path is referred to as the path of purification (Bhuddhagosa, 1976). The mind that is free from conflict is thereby the ontological justification for Buddhist ethics. Peace of mind, that is, freedom from conflict in one's daily life, is both the justification for ethical conduct and the baseline from which the construct validity of ethical conduct can be assessed.

Through peace of mind, therefore, *sati-panna* leads back to *sila*. It does so, however, not simply to embellish entry-level *sila*, that is, the gradual training, but to instate a more sophisticated level of *sila*, beyond the gradual training, that is an important constituent of Buddhist *praxis*. This higher order of self-restraint facilitates stronger concentration (*samadhi*) which, in turn, promotes a more penetrating self-critique (*sati-panna*) leading to deeper insights, hence a more profound peace of mind which further raises the liberating understanding of self-restraint[50]. These interrelationships are charted in Figure 4. The complementarity of the different components of Buddhist *praxis* that has been outlined in this chapter is summarized in Figure 5.

Fig 4

Fig 5

5.4 Pathological Nihilism

Of the three aspects of Buddhist *praxis*, perhaps the practice of self-restraint (*sila*) has most sociological relevance in that the Buddhist precepts prescribe an explicit code of interpersonal conduct. Moreover, voluntary moral restraint is particularly germane to the discussion of consumption because it represents the anti-thesis of the impulsivity characterizing the insatiable consumer. Although it appears that the moral subject of Buddhist *praxis* stands face to face with the amoral subject of consumption, from the Theravadin perspective, this appearance is misleading since there is no subject of moral conduct in Buddhism, just as there was no subject of moral experience among the ancient Greeks[51] (Foucault, 1990). By extension, there is no amoral subject of consumption from the perspective of Buddhist *praxis* but rather there is an untamed mind, that is, a mind consumed by desire[52].

Medically, consumption refers to "a wasting of tissue" (AHD: 287). The consumptive in the nineteenth century represented a debilitating disease, tuberculosis of the lungs. Culturally, the insatiable consumer represents a debilitating mental disease that exhausts the mind, a wasting of mental energy. Consumption as a mental pathology is perhaps symptomatic of the cultural illness Nietzsche referred to as pathological nihilism. According to Nietzsche, the collapse of the Christian-moral interpretation of the world will naturally result in a period of nihilism in which the world appears to be valueless. However, Nietzsche thought nihilism to be a transitional phase, and that "just because the world *looks* valueless does not mean that it *is* valueless" (Schacht, 1995: 38).

> For it is not the intrinsic meaninglessness and incomprehensibility of the world itself that [Nietzsche] holds to be the source of the coming nihilism. Rather its source is held to be the collapse of an (erroneous) *interpretation* of the world. (Ibid: 39).

For Nietzsche, the untenability of the Christian moral worldview "awakens the suspicion that *all* interpretations of the world are false" (1967: 1). Pathological nihilists do not just repudiate the previously accepted worldview but generalize that repudiation by denying the tenability of *all* worldviews (Schacht, 1995): "What is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all" (Nietzsche, 1967: 13). Pathological nihilism ratifies consumerism: Everything is permissible because there is no tenable worldview that can justify self restraint. Nihilism underwrites the utilitarian imperatives of consumer culture according to which everything is permissible. Buddhist *praxis* is challenged at the interface of Buddhism and modern consumption by the dogmatic assumption of pathological nihilism that *all* interpretations of the world are equally untenable. Consequently, of the three aspects of Buddhist *praxis*, ethical conduct is likely the most difficult for western practitioners to comprehend.

5.5 The Basis for Ethical Action in Buddhism

In juxtaposing the modern practitioner with the insatiable consumer, the critical issue is not the practice of self-restraint but the tenability of the moral worldview which renders Buddhist self-restraint, hence Buddhist *praxis* itself, meaningful. What is at stake is the legitimation of modern Buddhist *praxis*. The system of ethics in Theravada Buddhism is legitimated on different grounds than those of Christian ethics or Kant's moral philosophy. In contrast to the Christian-moral worldview there is no Creator of the universe who legislates moral laws, whereas in contrast to Kantian ethics there is no transcendental subject who legislates universal moral imperatives. There is nonetheless a highly rigorous ethical code in Theravada Buddhism. On what basis then is morality legitimated in Buddhist *praxis*?

According to Chah (1992b), the Buddha stated that the practice of moral restraint was easy because it simply means taking care of the mind. The criterion for virtuous conduct is the claim that everything one does affects the mind. The individual is therefore the locus of moral action, as in Kantian ethics. However, in contrast to the metaphysical basis for moral action in Kantian ethics, which is premised on abstract practical reason, the basis for moral action in Buddhist *praxis* is premised on existential and empirical grounds. Existential, because the validity of Buddhist practice of self-restraint is legitimated through the observation of ordinary everyday life: "Wisdom does not come from studying great theories or philosophies but from observing the ordinary" (Sumedho, 1990: 15). Empirical, because the mind is also considered to be a sense base in addition to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Objects of mind, including emotions, thoughts, and perceptions, can be observed as they arise and pass away in the mind in the same way as the arising and passing of the taste of chocolate cake on the tongue or the coolness of a summer breeze on one's face can be observed. The central purpose of self-observation in Buddhist *praxis* is to verify for oneself that there is in fact no 'essential' self to be found anywhere in either body or mind (Nanasampano, 1997). Direct observation of body and mind disabuses the individual of whatever identification one might have with any aspect of body or mind as being one's 'true' self. If there is no abiding separate self, *self*-restraint is a misnomer; what is actually at issue is *sense* restraint. A Sri Lankan monk at the center referred to ethical conduct as '*sense* restraint' and not '*self* restraint'.

The Buddhist doctrine of no self (*anatta*) begs the question as to how moral action is possible without a moral subject. In Kantian ethics, the transcendental subject is the source of moral action. There is no comparable 'essential' self in Buddhism, quite the contrary in fact. Self-reflection is not only aimed at disabusing the practitioner of unconscious assumptions that an 'essential' self exists, insight into this existential fact is the source of moral agency in Buddhist *praxis*. Reflexivity makes possible moral action without needing to refer to a moral subject. The ability of the mind to observe its own movement is the key factor in taking care of the mind. Taking care of the mind means that if everything one does affects the mind, then one is careful about one's actions. The practitioner is not obliged to conform to the Buddhist precepts but to discover the effects of his or her own actions on the mind.

5.5.1 Stoicism & Buddhist *Praxis*

The Buddhist injunction to care for the mind is analogous to the ancient Greek injunction to 'take care of yourself'. According to Foucault (1988b) 'taking care of yourself' was one of the two main principles of ancient Greek culture. In fact, 'taking care of yourself' took precedence over the other principle, the Delphic maxim to 'know yourself'.

> The precept 'to be concerned with oneself' was, for the Greeks, one of the main principles of cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life. For us now this notion is rather obscure and faded. When one is asked, 'What is the most important principle in ancient philosophy?' the immediate answer is not 'Take care of oneself' but the Delphic principle, 'Know yourself'. Perhaps our philosophical tradition has overemphasized the latter and forgotten the former. (Ibid: 19-20)

The maxim 'know yourself' did not convey to the ancient Greek that there was a 'true' self to be discovered. In neither Buddhism nor Stoicism is there a subject of virtuous conduct. There is moral action but there is no moral agent per se, such as the transcendental subject in Kantian ethics. Right *action* is the point of reference, not a moral *agent* of action. Therefore the practice of self-restraint in Buddhist *praxis* has greater similarity to Stoic ethics than to Christian morality since it emphasizes moral action rather than a moral actor. The Stoic retreat, like a Buddhist meditation retreat, is a retreat into one's self; however, the self is conceived entirely differently from both Christian 'soul-searching' and the self-absorption of the Romantic subject[53].

> The Stoics spiritualized the notion of *anachoresis*, the retreat of an army, the hiding of an escaped slave from his master, or the retreat into the country away from the towns. A retreat into the country becomes a spiritual retreat into oneself. It is a general attitude and also a precise act every day; you retire into the self to discover—but not to discover faults and deep feelings, only to remember rules of action, the main laws of behavior. (Ibid: 34)

As mentioned earlier, one sense of the Buddhist word for mindfulness (*sati*) is 'to remember': mindfully reflecting on the teachings (*dhamma*). At issue in both the Stoic and the Buddhist meditation retreat is the harmonization of *praxis* and *theoria*, a point that was succinctly expressed by a subject in the study.

> To say it and to do it are two different things. You have to *remember* to do it. You have to not just say it and talk about it but do it. Just like knowing and talking about meditation but not doing it. That applies to the entire practice. (Interview #4, original emphasis).

In Buddhism, change is claimed to be a universal law. In contrast to the Platonic concept of a 'real' world of fixed unchanging forms (Angeles, 1981) and the Christian view of an immortal soul, the Buddhist view is that everything changes, including the self: No unchanged abiding essence, soul, or transcendental subject is presumed to remain unaltered from the moment of one's birth to the moment of one's death. In addition to the law of change there is the law of *karma*, or action, and more specifically of moral action. Within the context of universal change, intentional action and the consequences of that action is presumed to operate in a lawful manner.

Action, and not an immutable moral agent, is thereby the reference point for Buddhist ethics. The ancient Stoics held a similar orientation in so far as their highly "ethical style of existence" did not depend on the assumption of a moral subject (Foucault, 1990: 253).

> No Greek thinker ever found a definition of the subject and never searched for one. I would simply say there is no subject. Which does not mean that the Greeks did not strive to define the conditions in which an experience would take place—an experience not of the subject but of the individual, to the extent that the individual wants to constitute itself as

> its own master. What was missing in classical antiquity was the problematization of the constitution of the self as subject. Beginning with Christianity we have the opposite: the appropriation of morality by the theory of the subject (Ibid).

5.5.2 Freedom From Self-Entrapment

Freedom to the Stoics, according to Foucault (1988b), meant the freedom from self-enslavement. To be free from self-enslavement demanded voluntary adherence to a rigorous ethical code which is different from conforming to social norms. Similarly, freedom in Buddhist practice refers to freedom from human suffering (*dukkha*), self-restraint is not a matter of dutifully conforming to social norms but of direct insight into the cause of human conflict.

Clarity leaves no doubt about action. Insight therefore has nothing to do with 'free choice'. So-called free choice, as Krishnamurti (1973) puts it, indicates confusion about what to do. In seeing her 'options' the subject saw, in effect, that she had no options. There was no choice in the matter. Immediate action followed from direct perception of seeing the danger she was in. The task in Buddhist *praxis* is *patipada*: The wise must know for themselves (Chah, 1992b). *Patipada* refers to directly seeing for oneself the danger of *not* abiding by moral restraint. Consequently it is insight into one's existential condition, and not a moral subject, that is the foundation of ethical conduct in Theravada Buddhism. Moral action thereby springs from existential rather than metaphysical grounds. For example, an individual witnesses a fatal accident, a pedestrian hit by a car while crossing the road is, and henceforth always looks both ways before crossing the street. This practice of looking both ways before crossing the road is existentially validated to this individual because the lifeworld danger is evident to him. Similarly, the practice of self-restraint requires not social conformity to precepts but to discover for oneself the existential danger zones to which the precepts point. Insight is therefore the source of ethical action in Buddhist practice.

5.6 Two Levels of the Practice of Self-Restraint

Taking care of the mind, to repeat, legitimates self-restraint on the understanding that everything one does affects the mind. One's conduct exerts a direct influence on tranquility meditation. Since a concentrated mind generates mental clarity, unrestrained conduct undermines an individual's capacity for clarity of mind. The socially imposed self-restraint of a meditation retreat provides ideal, albeit artificial, conditions for the mind to settle into a calm state, making clarity of mind possible.

> That's why a ten-day retreat is a very deep experience. Because, as the retreat goes on and on, your mind becomes more and more settled. And, like, all the muddy water, the particulate matter settles to bottom and the water becomes very clear. So anything you put in that water you can *see*. Whereas if it's muddy, you lose sight of it right away (Interview #12).

5.6.1 The Gradual Training

Although the external setting (physical and social) of a vipassana retreat promotes the development of tranquility meditation, one's lifestyle prior to the retreat also determines the outcome. Without a minimal amount of self restraint in everyday life, the 'particulate matter' of the mind will not settle, as demonstrated in the narrative of the subject struggling with insatiable cravings. A prominent feature of heedless behavior that clouds the water is remorse over past unskilful conduct. The narrative of the following subject indicates how remorse obstructs clarity of mind (*samadhi*), demonstrating how the gradual training of basic self-restraint is a necessary condition for Buddhist *praxis*. The subject was a muscular middle-aged engineer who, in describing his youth when he was a belligerently rebellious young man, derogatorily referred to himself as "king dirt bag": a "hard-drinking, hard-fighting, whore-chasing" biker from hell. In short, this subject fits the societal stereotype of the extreme lack of moral restraint bikers are presumed to represent. Arrested for illegal possession of drugs, the subject was unexpectedly thrown into solitary confinement for five days.

> I got myself in really bad trouble and wound up locked up. It was the fourth of July weekend, a holiday, and they couldn't out-process me. I wasn't supposed to be there. I was stuck in a six by nine cell for five days, twenty-four hours a day, with nothing to read but a rule book and a Bible. They had the cells arranged so you can't see anybody, you're not allowed to

> speak. Five days of that. By the second day I was climbing the wall. I was freaking. I was absolutely freaking. (Interview #27)

The conditions of solitary confinement are comparable to that of a vispassana retreat in so far as external activities are dramatically circumscribed. However, there is no 'cultivating object' in relation to which this individual could develop his subjective culture. Without the cultural context of Buddhist *praxis*, the subject found the experience of solitary confinement extremely traumatic. What happened next to this morally unrestrained youth suggests that a latent function of insatiable consumption is an active, albeit unconscious, avoidance of being alone with one's self.

> I almost lost it. I mean, I cried hours and hours on end. It's been like torture. I couldn't believe I was having to go through it. You can imagine here, in a little six by nine: There's nothing to read. You can't talk to anyone. You can't see anyone. There's nothing to read, nothing to do. You can't smoke. You can't do anything, you just sit in your cell. You just sit in there. (Ibid)

In the imposed 'retreat' setting of a solitary jail cell, the subject observed through his own experience what the Buddha alluded to in claiming that self-restraint is not difficult since moral conduct is simply a matter of taking care of the mind. When the perpetually pre-occupied hedonistic mind is no longer able to pursue pleasure, the existential fact that whatever one does affects the mind floods into consciousness. The mind is confronted by the psychic consequences of one's past actions. The subject had no choice in this matter.

> Every bad thing I'd ever done in my entire life, every unskilful action came back to me in the course of that four or five days. I thought about every word I'd ever spoken in anger to someone, uh, my parents. The legacy of my drug and alcohol rages and sexual promiscuity, everything that I'd ever done and said, I had lived through it again. I really lived every second of it. Every minute of it. And I look back on it now, and that was almost a religious experience. (Ibid)

However intense, the incident was not a life-changing experience for the subject. Because the mind was overwhelmed by remorse, clarity of mind was impossible. Because concentrating the mind was out of the question, insight was therefore also impossible. Because there was no insight, there was no understanding, hence no action, no fundamental change in one's way of being in the world. While intense and traumatic, what was almost 'a life-changing experience' for the subject did bring about insight. Upon his release, the subject immediately resumed his militant hedonism, quickly forgetting the shock of his five-day 'retreat' in jail.

> It was really weird. I mean I can't even put a label on the depth of my depression and despair. It was intense. It's weird. I look back on it now, and I see that it was almost a life-changing experience. It was a monumental occasion. I didn't think so at the time. Again, I dulled myself back out pretty quickly afterwards. No way to frame it. The impact of it was diminished. It diminished pretty quickly because, again, that was back when I was heavily into alcohol and drugs, promiscuity, and what-not. (Ibid)

The subject's narrative contradicts the nihilistic assumption that it does not really matter what you do. When forced to be alone, the subject discovered past unskilful actions do in fact have consequences: intense unpleasant feelings from which the mind cannot escape. The subject later mused that he now voluntarily undertakes the 'solitary confinement' of meditation retreats but that he now has a way to 'frame it.' In other words, he now has access to a cultivating object from which the development of subjective culture can proceed. The development of the total individual in this case does not refer to a technical formula for reaching enlightenment. The practice of *sila* has been described to be like playing the piano, the practice of an art. It is to this sense of *sila* as the practice of the art of living that we now turn.

5.6.2 The Art of Living

As indicated above, the mind is the locus of virtue in Buddhism. The subject's experience in solitary is not that of a sinner being punished for his sins, from the Buddhist perspective, but a demonstration of the existential fact that unskilful action has a strong impact on the mind. Unskilful action generates psychological 'hell realms'. The subject had created his own hell; he was not thrown into it. While the Romantic hero of modernity is free to act as he pleases, he is at the same time his "own proper hell," to use a phrase from the nineteenth century English poet Byron (Gillespie, 1995). Conversely, skilful action generates 'heavenly states' of mind referred to as 'divine abodes' or 'deva realms'. As a young man in a prison cell, overcome by remorse, the subject was not capable of reaching the point of clarity to see as an existential fact that heaven and hell exist as states of mind created and sustained by different kinds of action. His narrative testifies to the importance of the gradual training in Buddhist *praxis*.

Taking care of the mind is therefore of fundamental importance in Buddhist *praxis*. It is in taking care of the mind that voluntary self-restraint is legitimated. At the other end of the scale in this regard, the narrative of another subject, a professional thirty year old woman, illustrates how the practice of self-restraint was consciously taken up as the practice of freedom. If gradual training represents the point of entry to Buddhist *praxis*, this subject's attitude toward ethical conduct represents the apotheosis Buddhist *praxis* as an art of living.

> I was involved in some stuff that I don't really feel I can go into. Just to the effect of, that in cahoots with certain friends, I was on the brink of doing some very, very unwholesome activities. And then I went to Thailand. Taking a two week retreat at one temple, I discovered the eight precepts. And suddenly I discovered morality and conscience on a level I had never ever understood before. (Interview #10)

Perception *is* action in the case of insight (Krishnamurti, 1973). When the subject discovers the danger in what she was about to do, the liability in it, she immediately gives it up. The previous subject did not see the liability in what he was doing and so he headed right back into danger zone[54]. To be able to see clearly and distinctly for oneself is the critical question in the practice of self-restraint. The condition for clarity of mind, which the previous subject did not have, is a minimal level of moral restraint. In the case of the present subject, the benefit of at least some gradual training facilitated strength of mind (that is, concentration) and these conditions of possibility ignited a life-changing insight.

> And then I saw my danger... I could see it, the range of possibilities: from complete wholesomeness like a deva-like existence to hell realm in this life... in terms of a futility and misery of existence and a joy and happiness and a purity of existence. And I could see that where I was projected was off toward the misery quadrant. And I could see that if I change things right now, I could go anywhere within the other quadrant of the purity and joy, up to the highest. (Ibid)

In contrast to the previous subject's desire to forget his experience of solitary confinement, this subject resolved *not* to forget what she had discovered. Subjective cultivation proceeded apace with the interaction between this modern individual and the cultivating object of Theravada Buddhism. After the retreat she made a formal public commitment to continue maintaining the eight precepts that she had upheld during it because she "didn't want to lose this understanding that [she] had gained (Ibid)."

5.6.3 The Awakening of Conscience

Upon returning to the United States, the subject made yet another public vow, again formally and in the presence of a monk, this time to maintain the eight precepts for six months. Everyone was surprised by this unprecedented act, including the monk but especially the lay people who were astonished that anyone who is not a monastic would commit herself to such an undertaking.

> And the reason behind all of this was that spectrum of possibilities. Five precepts didn't convey a strict enough idea of morality for me to stay out of that unwholesome course of action. But keeping it at eight precepts, I was going to keep every precept at such a high level, the very best that I could manage, that I knew that I would not go into that unwholesome course of action. And it gave me time to collect myself, and clear my mind, and figure out how I really want to live my life. Because I was really on the brink of this whole way of going that [criminal route]. (Ibid)

Since insight is the source of moral agency, the individual is the ultimate source of moral authority in Buddhism. From the perspective of Buddhist *praxis*, the question of ethical nihilism cannot ultimately be answered through social consensus or the imposition of moral norms, but only through the individual's discovery of existential freedom. Although the subject found freedom from self-entrapment, she cannot force her friends to be free, Rousseau not withstanding. The subject was not able to bestow her clarity on anyone else; she had solved her problem but not that of her outlaw friends.

> In retrospect, I'd probably be in jail right now and not [at a Buddhist center] <laughs>. In a hell realm I mean. I have a friend who went in that direction and she has been arrested once. And, you know, she laughs it off. I'm just looking at her, like, 'Geez!' We split directions, and she kept going that way. Yeah. So, whoa! (Ibid)

The amoral attitude of her outlaw friends is completely in line with the pathological nihilism that partly underlies their socialization as consumers. Parting ways with her outlaw friends indicates the revolution in social relationship resulting from the subject's insight. She described her conversion from an amoral to a moral worldview as gaining a conscience. The term she uses she takes from Buddhist *theoria*, which in the Pali is called *hiri* and *ottapa*.

> Yeah. I gained *hiri* and *ottapa*, in Pali, and they translate as 'shame' and 'fear of wrong-doing'. Shame is like the wrong word, you know, for the '90's. You can't be ashamed anymore. But it's conscience. (Ibid)

Note in this passage how Buddhism as a cultivating object represents a counter tendency to the prevailing cultural norms of consumer society. "Conscience" is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as "the faculty of recognizing the distinction between right and wrong in one's own conduct" (1981: 283). The standard through which this distinction is made should not be presumed to be a social norm. Conscience is not necessarily a matter of conformity to group norms, as suggested by the second sense of conscience cited in the same dictionary: "Conformity to one's own sense of right conduct (Ibid)." The etymology of the word traces back to the Latin verb *conscire* ("to be conscious, know well"), whose component parts consist of the intensive *com* prefixed to the verb *scire*: "to know" (Ibid). Partridge adds that "like conscious, conscience is a compound word from a family of words headed by the most eminent descendant of the verb *scire*, 'to know': science (1983: 594)". In Buddhist *praxis* self-knowledge is the basis of *hiri* and *ottapa*—'shame' and 'fear of wrong doing'—which are considered to be the guardians of the world.

Hiri and *ottapa* refer to both an art and a science. Self-knowledge emerges as conscience from Buddhist *praxis* as a science of mind, that is, through the mindful investigation of body and mind. However, the practice of self-restraint also refers to the art of living. Maintaining the Buddhist precepts is like learning to play the piano, as one western monk put it: an art rather than a battle (Sumedho, 1992a). The practice of skilful conduct is not framed as a battle between the forces of good and evil but as an aesthetic way of being in the world. Buddhist *praxis* is therefore both a science of mind and an art of living. Accordingly the subject used the language of aesthetics to describe her experimentation with keeping the precepts. Simmel's concept of subjective culture is eloquently illustrated here.

> Each precept has a very literal interpretation. You know, you could take the one about lying, and it could mean, 'Don't tell a falsity.' And then it could also mean, ' Don't twist the truth.' And then as you understand more, it could mean, 'No harsh

> language, no gossip, no frivolous talk, and no deceit.' And then it could also mean, 'Speaking beautifully. Speaking kindly. Speaking harmoniously.' And so, as my understanding of speech, the function of speech, the impact of speech, has more and more clarity to it, then my keeping of the speech precept is at a more beautiful level. And so, all along, as my understanding and clarity grows, my keeping of five or eight precepts becomes more beautiful. (Interview #10)

Beauty in this passage implies harmonious social relationships that flow from the dialectic between self-knowledge and personal conduct. It is from understanding disorder that order emerges, according to Krishnamurti (1973). As an aesthetic way of being in the world, the Buddhist practice of self-restraint is not a matter of obedience but wisdom. Following the precepts means to investigate them to discover the sources of disharmony in daily life, and thereby to 'know the world': 'The wise must know for themselves.' In taking up the practice of voluntary self-restraint as the practice of freedom, the subject consciously responds to the challenge posed by pathological nihilism.

It is through existential insight, through seeing the source of human conflict, that ethical conduct is legitimated. Whereas the 'death of God' signalled the end of a metaphysical justification for moral conduct, the practice of Buddhist self-restraint is not based on metaphysics. Nor is this self-restraint the mechanical following of rules but rather the art of living within the parameter of an ethical code. Following the precepts is the condition of possibility for discovering, as did the subject, self-reflective ways of being in the world that promote social harmony, hence personal meaning. The locus of meaning is the creation of oneself through voluntarily adhering to a code of personal conduct.

> So, when keeping eight precepts, when keeping them beautifully, then there's a trust, and a faith, and a purity in my interactions. I'm trusting where I'm coming from. And I'm a trustworthy person. So there is, again, the word 'beauty' comes up—a harmony of relationship with other human beings that's not possible without that hardcore underlying barrier: 'I'm keeping eight precepts.' (Ibid)

To summarize, the last two narratives demonstrate how self-restraint functions in Buddhist *praxis* as both a point of entry and as an art of living. Gradual training made possible the insightful self-knowledge through which one subject consciously took up self-restraint as the practice of freedom from self entrapment. Lack of moral restraint, by contrast, barred the other subject from breaking out of the self-entrapment of militant hedonism. When forced to be alone with himself, his mind was overwhelmed by remorse, which obstructed his experience of solitary confinement from being a life-changing experience. Instead the subject immediately plunged back into militant hedonism to 'erase' the episode from memory. He subsequently underwent two more marriages, many years of substance abuse, and was eventually arrested for illegal possession of heroin. It is at that point that he took up Buddhist *praxis*. For the former subject, who had some gradual training, being alone with herself did in fact lead to a life-changing insight. She formally committed herself to voluntary self-restraint so that she would *not* forget her discovery and maintained her resolve until, a year and a half after the interview, she ordained as a Buddhist nun. This subject's unusual devotion to a rigorous ethical code is not anchored in a transcendental moral agent (Kantian subject) nor to an external higher power (as in the Twelve Steps). Its point of reference is freedom from self-entrapment, an existential orientation that is apparently common to both Buddhist *praxis* and Stoicism.

To conclude the chapter then, Buddhist *praxis* is not just meditation (*samadhi* & *sati*), it also involves self-restraint and self-critique. Buddhist *praxis* therefore consists of three over-arching domains of practice—*sila, samadhi, sati-panna*—that operate together, supporting and strengthening one another. Each of these components of the path can only be understood through reference to the other two. The path itself is inaccessible, however, unless there is a rudimentary level of moral restraint. *Sati-panna* only operates when *samadhi* is present, and *samadhi* is impossible without at least a minimum level of *sila*. Hence the necessity of the gradual training. Without a basic level of *sila*, Buddhist *praxis* is not possible.

Accordingly, modern Buddhist *praxis* will be explored in terms of *sila*, *samadhi*, and *sati-panna*. This chapter focused on *sila*, both as the first step in the feedback loop (*sila* at the level of the gradual training) as well as the more advanced level of voluntary sense restraint as the art of living. The next chapter, Chapter Six, will focus on Buddhist meditation. Meditation is the most familiar aspect of Buddhist *praxis* in the west. There are two types of Theravadin meditation practices: *samadhi* and *vipassana*. Vipassana meditation extols mindfulness, or *sati*, and the discussion of *sati*, which an integral part of *sati-panna*, will lead naturally to a consideration of self-critique (*panna*) in Chapter Seven. Although *panna* is the core of Buddhist *praxis*, it is probably the least well understood aspect of it. Moral restraint and meditation are relatively uncomplicated and straight-forward. However, since critique is an intrinsic feature of modernity (Kelly, 1995), self-critique should not be thought to be particularly alien to the Western mind. What is apparently more alien, given our socialization as insatiable consumers, is conceiving of voluntary self-restraint as a cultural value.

Chapter Six: Theravada Buddhist Meditation

> In Buddhism [there are] two kinds of meditation. One is called 'samadhi', the other 'vipassana'. Samadhi meditation is one of concentrating the mind on an object, rather than letting it wander off to other things. One chooses an object such as the sensation of the inhalation and exhalation. Eventually through this practice you begin to experience a calm mind—and you become tranquil because you are cutting off all other impingements that come up through the senses. (Sumedho, 1985: 13-14)

6.1 Concentration Practice (*Samadhi*)

The passage above is a standard description of concentration meditation (*samadhi*). Excerpts from this passage will be juxtaposed with excerpts from the narrative of a subject who had just completed his first ten-day meditation retreat at the center in order to illustrate the interface between the practice of concentrating the mind on a neutral object (that is, on the breath) with the socialization of the insatiable consumer whose mind is habituated to focus on pleasant objects. The subject was a thirty-two year old man, an extremely athletic Caucasian American who perceived himself to have a problem with addictive behaviors, although he was not actually an addict. His concern in regard to strong desires for cigarettes, alcohol, sex, food, was a reason he came to the meditation retreat. The subject expected to be overwhelmed by craving, and had prepared himself to face withdrawal symptoms similar to those of a heroin addict in recovery.

> In the last couple of years I was just feeling gross, you know, all the time. Craving, basically. I mean I'm not a junkie, I never have been, but that kind of feeling, you know, for women, for marijuana, cigarettes, things like that. How was the retreat? It's been hard all along, but good. Craving is still a big issue with me. It hasn't gone away. But the fact that I've been here for almost two weeks and pretty relaxed, even though I [haven't been] smoking or drinking or any of that stuff, is indicative of some peace. (Interview #9)

The mind of the insatiable consumer in the context of a Theravadin meditation retreat is analogous to the body of the alcoholic at a detoxification center. The 'detoxifying' agent in the relation between market consumption and concentration practice is a question of what the mind concentrates on, as Sumedho points out in the passage below.

> Excitement is easy to concentrate on, isn't it? You don't have to exert any effort to watch something that is very exciting or romantic or adventurous. But the breath is not interesting, not romantic, not scintillating—it just is as it is. So you have to arouse effort to concentrate on the ordinary feeling of your body as it is right now: to sustain and hold your attention on your breathing. When you do that, the breath becomes more and more refined, and you calm down. I know people who have prescribed samadhi meditation for high blood pressure because it calms the heart. So this is tranquility meditation (Sumedho, 1985: 13-14).

The contrast between the tranquility outside the excitation of market consumption puts a different slant to Baudrillard's claim that consumption is not a material practice. The locus of consumption, as Campbell's theory implies, is the mind. Nevertheless, the subject's narrative also goes on to suggest that consumption involves habits of mind (consumer socialization) which, if they 'grip' the individual, become a "material force" much like Marx expected radical critique to become a material force once it "grips the masses". The billions of dollars spent annually in the United States alone on advertising (Jhally, 1998a) testifies to the enormous expense of sustaining the structure of socialization which generates the insatiable consumer. Once the "grip" of consumer consciousness was loosened, the subject not only experienced 'some peace' of mind, but also observed the power of thought in constructing consumer 'reality' (which is the 'theft' of reality in Baudrillard's view).

> But the fact that I've been here for almost two weeks and pretty relaxed, even though I [haven't been] smoking or drinking or any of that stuff, is indicative of some peace. That's one of the striking things about this, I've almost braced myself for more resistance than I've encountered. I think a part of me is being soothed and comforted and nourished that really does sort of cancel out the craving. Or it, you know, it keeps it in check. So even though I still wrestle with cravings, it passes really quick. And it's almost like if I don't think about it, it's not even real. It's not even there. It's weird. (Interview #9)

Thought breeds pleasure, claims Krishnamurti (1973); his point concisely describes the fundamental principle upon which Campbell fashioned his theory of consumption. It is not desire per se that is the problem, from the perspective of Theravada Buddhism, but the attachment to pleasure. Attachment to pleasure, according to Buddhist doctrine, constitutes a state of suffering (*dukkha*), as exemplified by the subject's constant craving in habitually pursuing pleasurable thoughts of material objects. When his attention was focused on the physical reality of the body, the subject discovers the 'theft' of reality which Baudrillard associates with consumption, as an existential fact, at the juncture of fantasy and daydream. "If you don't think about it" (that is, if you do not daydream about what the habituated mind craves for) then "it's not even real" (one does not suffer). The subject was also momentarily relieved of the burden of selfhood in directly observing the insubstantiality of his taken for granted definition of who he is: someone who has a big problem with craving, like a heroin addict. The subject did not, in fact, find the depraved addict that he had presupposed himself to be. What he discovered instead was a relation between thought and feeling, with no reference to an essential 'self'. Buddhist *praxis* differs radically from Christian mysticism on this point. When asked what he thought the relationship was between Zen Buddhism and Christianity, Foucault responded that

> in Christianity one is always in search of further individuation. One is attempting to grasp what is at the basis of the individual soul. 'Tell me who you are': that is the spirituality of Christianity. In Zen, it seems to me that all the techniques connected to spirituality tend, on the contrary, to obliterate the individual. (quoted in Eribon, 1991: 310)

6.1.1 The Shangri-la Stereotype[55]

The 'obliteration' of the individual, in this case, alludes to the obliteration of market individualism, a form of subjectivity which constitutes and regulates the insatiable consumer. Juxtaposing the two passages, that of Sumedho and that of the subject, serves to differentiate the calm state of mind in *samadhi* meditation from the agitated state of mind intrinsic to the insatiable consumer. However, the importance of *samadhi* is not tranquility but strength of mind. The self-empowerment *samadhi* practice engenders is obscured by what I will refer to as the Shangri-la stereotype.

Samadhi has become an increasingly common word in the west. For example, "I'd rather be in *samadhi*" was painted on the side of a concession stand tent at a recent Fringe festival of theatrical arts in Edmonton. 'Samadhi' evokes the following western stereotype of exotic eastern meditation: a thin yogi, eyes closed, legs crossed in full lotus, sitting in bliss. In the eastern meditation stereotype, peace is constituted as a Romantic fantasy, an escape from the world into a Shangri-la of the mind where the enlightened live happily in unbounded inner bliss. However, it should be evident from the discussion in the preceding chapter that, in Buddhist *praxis*, escape from everyday life is precisely *not* what leads to peace. On the contrary, only when the existential angst of everyday life is consciously faced and decisively resolved does peace emerge. Since peace of mind is claimed to be obscured by lifeworld conflict, the understanding in Buddhism *praxis* is that the only way *out* is *through* (Goldstein, 1983).

Resolving lifeworld conflict rather than running away from it is facilitated through an occasional 'time-out' at a meditation retreat setting. However a meditation retreat is not intended to be an escape from ordinary life. The burdened mind that is unburdened on retreat has little significance in itself unless it as a point of departure for the gradual training. Freedom, not comfort, is the objective. The line between consumption and Buddhist *praxis* is therefore easily crossed at this juncture.

The conflict-free zone of a meditation retreat is analogous to the alcohol-free zone of a detoxification center. Attending a meditation retreat and then carrying on in daily life as one did prior to the retreat, as is often the case (Chah, 1996), is like an alcoholic drying out at a detoxification center only to resume drinking once he is back home. It is the resolve to stay free of conflict that initiates the gradual training (basic *sila*) as a practice just as the resolve to stay sober initiates recovery from alcoholism.

6.1.1.1 Strength of Mind

Without going beyond the gradual training the path will not progress, being akin to learning the alphabet without learning how to read and write. However, although gradual training is necessary to resolve existential conflict, self-restraint alone is not enough. The issue is whether the individual can be free of his own conditioning on the understanding that "as long as the mind is conditioned, there must be conflict" (Krishnamurti 1973: 506). To face up to the problems of daily life requires enough strength of mind to counter the force of habit that perpetrates conflict in the lifeworld. From this perspective it is not tranquility that most significantly distinguishes Buddhist *praxis* from consumerism, in regard to *samadhi*, but power of mind that samadhi bestows.

> True concentration is a wholesome one-pointedness of mind. Unwholesome one-pointedness of mind is also possible, but it will not lead to Liberation. You can be very single-mindedly in a state of lust. But that gets you nowhere. Uninterrupted focus on something you hate does not help you at all. True concentration itself is free from such contaminants. It is a state in which the mind is gathered together and thus gains power and intensity. (Gunaratana, 1992: 162)

The narrative of the subject on his first retreat demonstrates how the complex of subjective needs that constitutes the insatiable consumer as a creature of habit perpetually drains the mind, in effect, obstructing the empowerment of mind of *samadhi*. The contrast between a calm mind and the perpetually agitated consumer mind is not in itself particularly noteworthy. A tranquilizer also calms the mind. However, the capacity to rest and refresh the mind through concentration practice is a form of personal power. Moreover, this base of personal power is also a haven for the individual in the postmodern psychosis of consumer society where mass media messages continually besiege the senses (Jacobson & Mazur, 1995; Jhally, 1998a). Another subject in the study, a highly educated Caucasian American male in his 50's, described the capacity to anchor the mind in the 'reality' of the body as both a refuge and a tool for psychological survival.

> Meditation is an opportunity to give your mind a rest. It's a refuge. My mind used to always run a lot. It gives you a chance for your mind to rest. And a time to slow down and let your mind have a rest. And it's a refuge from that standpoint. And I know the breath is a very powerful tool. Because once I was having a very bad trip when I was a young kid. And I naturally sort of focused on my breath. And my mind was going wild. And I thought I was going crazy. And I naturally focused on my breath. And I've had other times where my mind has been racing away and just going. I could have followed it and, I think, ended up in a strait jacket. But by focusing on my breath, I've been able to come out of that. And so I know the breath is a very powerful tool (Interview #42).

In the preceding chapter, another subject spoke of his practice in identical terms: "I knew I had to meditate or I'd go insane" (Interview #4). Similarly, the subject on his first retreat alluded to the power of *samadhi* as a 'powerful tool' in commenting that "If I don't think about it, it's not even real." The power of fantasy and daydream became evident to this retreatant once the power of *samadhi* counterbalanced that particular movement of desire in the mind. Concentrating on the body, on the breath, rather than getting lost in imagination conserves cognitive energy. *Samadhi* is therefore a source of energy. In his theory of power relations, Foucault (1983b) maintains that power inscribes itself on the body. Power relations, in this sense, can be framed in terms of energy depletion through lifeworld conflict, as an elderly female subject related in describing the circumstances in which she began to practice meditation.

> [I started meditation practice] about the same time my husband retired from the business world. And he had more time, of course, and he was doing all the things he wanted to do. And I would just, you know, go along. But we never used to do what I wanted to do. And it was like, I keep referring to it as 'my batteries got all empty' and I had to go and recharge it because there was so much taking and not any giving back from the outside. So my batteries kind of had run dry and empty. And I had to look for something to recharge. And I think all this has worked for me and done it for me. What has helped me the most was concentration meditation. (Interview #5)

As this narrative illustrates, anchoring one's attention on the breath not only calms the mind but makes it stronger. Strength of mind, to recapitulate, and not tranquility of mind is what makes *samadhi* consequential. Nonetheless, like all stereotypes the Eastern meditation stereotype has some truth to it. *Samadhi* as the Shangri-la stereotype suggests is in fact characterized by heightened feelings of serenity, joy, and happiness (Chah, 1992b). What is misleading in this Western stereotype of oriental meditation is the assumption that the purpose of meditation is to calm the mind. The quiet mind is a *condition* for Buddhist *praxis;* it is not the goal. A male subject made this discovery at a ten-day retreat at the center.

> From meditation I could get the samadhi but I never quite understood that I could use that state. I never understood

> that I could take advantage of the awareness state by using the investigation property. One of the things we've learned this week is to investigate while we're in the awareness state.You start using it. It never occurred to me I could do that before. I was just sitting without the understanding of 'There's work to be done.' And, you know, right now I feel kind of silly because that's the whole reason I was sitting in the first place. Why it would take me so long to realize it? (Interview #7)

The subject was a physicist in his 40s. Since he was an obviously intelligent person, what prevented him from realizing sooner that the purpose of *samadhi* is to provide investigative power (*panna*)? In part, it could be because the oriental meditation stereotype obstructed his understanding of Buddhist *praxis*. This is an example of how we become trapped in our own history. The point was made in the last chapter that a rudimentary level of self-restraint is necessary for calming the mind and that this quiet concentrated mind operates as a necessary condition for critical self-reflection. The more rigorous the *sila*, the greater the capacity for one-pointed concentration, such that the more powerful one's ability to focus attention, the sharper and hence the more incisive the self-investigation. *Samadhi* confers strength of mind which fortifies mindfulness and investigation just as, in comparison to a magnifying glass, a microscope enables more detailed observation hence a more precise empirical investigation.

6.1.2 The Clinical Stereotype

Another Eastern meditation stereotype, one that is more recent, is the representation of meditation as therapy (Feist & Brannon, 1988). The clinical stereotype extols the health benefits of *samadhi* for stress management, lowering blood pressure, and so forth. Whereas the Shangri-la stereotype represents Eastern meditation as a romanticized escape from the world, the clinical stereotype represents Eastern meditation as a way of surviving in a stressful world. A middle-aged male subject's narrative exemplifies the therapeutic status of Eastern meditation in the west where relaxation skills are a valued human resource.

> The peace of mind I was becoming more steeped in [was part of] an overall general improvement. It was a change of life. This one man knew me at work, he was an engineer, and he said he noticed a difference in me after I started meditating. He said I started to calm down. My health was a little bit better. I was always, earlier on, nervous, and had high blood pressure, high enough that I needed medical intervention. [But now] I felt more relaxed at work (Interview #23).

Like the Shangri-la stereotype, the therapeutic stereotype also has some truth to it. Concentration meditation can be beneficial to one's health, as the narrative above indicates. Nevertheless, the goal of *samadhi* is neither relaxation nor health benefits but to investigate the self. A twenty-three year old male subject, a university student, situated his transition to self-investigation at the point at which he broke from the clinical stereotype.

> When I first started, [meditation] was kind of like something to relax me. I didn't really see it then as a way to understand myself. But once I started practicing vipassana I started to see the reasons why I did things. I couldn't do things on impulse anymore because I would see the thought process in my mind. I was aware of it. I became a lot more aware of how I would create my own suffering in my mind: How a thought would come up and then I would feed on it, and I could see how I would get into a jam and how I would create it. And it really had a freeing effect on me. Right now it is very much a way of understanding myself. It's past the stage where it's something that relaxes me. It's really becoming something that I do to understand myself [Interview #39].

The 'freeing effect' the subject attributes to observing 'the thought process' thereby seeing how he 'creates [his] own suffering demonstrates the practice of self-investigation as the condition for freedom from self-entrapment. In contrast to the strength of mind fostered by *samadhi* meditation, the subject's freedom from being trapped in his own history denotes a different type of personal power, namely, the power of self-mastery[56].

The subject's two and a half years of concentration practice, which preceded his switch to the practice of self-investigation, is apparently a necessary condition for his freedom from self-entrapment. The strength of mind he had developed through *samadhi* made it possible for the subject to see how the mind creates its own suffering. Accompanying *samadhi's* celebrated calm (the 'blissed out' yogi stereotype) is a refreshed and energized clarity of mind perhaps comparable to that of 'runner's high'. Unlike the foggy-mindedness that accompanies the ingestion of a tranquilizing drug, the mind in *samadhi* is remarkably alert and clear. Putting that clarity of mind to work in critical self-inquiry is key to self-mastery.

6.1.2.1 Right Concentration & the Body

Samadhi energizes the mind in so far as tranquility meditation not only quiets the mind by 'yoking' it to the body in the endeavour to concentrate on the ordinary feeling of the body as it is right now; tranquility meditation also energizes the mind by conserving the vast amount of energy normally dissipated in discursive thought. In focusing on ordinary physiological sensations, the practice of *samadhi* operates as a conscious counterforce to the unconscious force of mental habits thereby derailing mindless hedonistic habits. The body is therefore an ontological anchor in Buddhist *praxis*. *Samadhi* practice, like athletic training, involves paying careful attention to one's actual physical condition. Whereas the athlete is concerned with performance, the practitioner is concerned with understanding the self. Close attention to the body is indispensable in critical self-reflection: strength of mind is predicated on the sustained focus on the body that strengthens the mind by bringing it to rest.

The socialization of the insatiable consumer, in contrast, tends to alienate the individual from his actual physical condition (Slater, 1997). The consumer's alienated relationship to his own body marks another border between Buddhist *praxis* and consumption. The insatiable consumer's obsession with body image contrasts sharply with immediate awareness of the body (Ibid). In gearing the mind toward direct awareness of physical sensation, Buddhist practice trains the individual to 'listen' to the body in a way comparable to certain forms of athletic training for professional runners, which will be discussed below.

6.2 Mindfulness Practice (*sati*)

In the quoted passage introducing this chapter Sumedho mentioned *Samadhi* practice is one of the two types of Buddhist meditation, the other is *vipassana* ('insight meditation') which involves self-investigation (*panna*) and mindful observation (*sati*) as the condition for insight. The practice of mindfulness is central to insight meditation. To begin, we will focus on the distinction between concentration and mindfulness. Whereas concentration practice (*samadhi*) aims at strength of mind, mindfulness practice (*sati*) aims for presence of mind. Concentrating the mind is an exercise in exclusion; mindfulness is a non-exclusive 'choiceless awareness' of whatever is happening in the present moment (Nyanaponika, 1969a/b; Goldstein, 1983; Gunaratana, 1994). A subject in the field study who did research in sport psychology, drew an analogy between these two types of Buddhist practice and two types of runners: dissociative and associative.

> There's two types of runners: one is a runner that dissociates and the other is a runner that associates. Dissociation is what most runners do. And that is, you're out, and you're doing a long run, and you're really starting to get tired, or it's painful, or whatever else. And you use a technique of saying, 'Oh, isn't it a beautiful blue sky', or 'Look at the tulips', or whatever it is: looking at things external to yourself in order to try and mask the fatigue that you might be feeling. (Interview #21)

6.2.1 Mindfulness of the Body

The above passage implies that dissociation is comparable to concentration meditation. However, tranquility meditation, while it involves concentration, focuses the mind on the body in contrast to the deliberate inattention to the body cultivated by dissociative runners. 'Concentration' may be a misleading English translation of the practice of *samadhi*. Another participant commented that he preferred to regard *samadhi* practice as *letting go* of thought rather than as *concentrating* the mind. Continuing the metaphor between types of runners and types of meditation practice, the subject drew an analogy between associative runners and mindfulness meditation.

> The second technique is association. From the moment you begin running, you pay close attention to precisely what's occurring in your musculature and skeleton. So if you start, for example, to feel that your right hamstring is tightening up, you can feel that. And you ultimately can learn to say, 'Well, all right, let's just relax. Let's keep the stride smooth. Let's let that hamstring relax.' The elite athletes are all associative runners. The distinguishing difference is that associative runners are more relaxed. Their muscles are more relaxed. The only muscles that are working are the ones that need to be working for that particular part of the leg swing. The consequence of that is less oxygen use. The dissociative runners are not focusing, and they're staying tense and tight. They're using more muscles than are absolutely necessary to go through the thing, so they use more oxygen for the same speed. So associative runners are lead runners. And they just get much better times. And if that's not a description of mindfulness of the body, I don't know what is. (Ibid)

In contrast to the self-absorbed insatiable consumer, associative runners 'listen' to the body rather than alienating the mind from the body. Although the associative technique is an apt analogy for mindfulness of the body, it does not entirely convey mindfulness practice. The Buddhist practice of mindfulness consists of two domains: mindfulness of the body and mindfulness of the mind. 1) The analogy the subject draws is between association and mindfulness of the body, which encompasses the first domain but omits the second[57]. As Buddhist *praxis,* mindfulness of the body also goes beyond awareness of physical sensations to awareness of whatever you do with the body, the domain of speech and action, so that it is directly linked to personal conduct (that is, to the practice of self-restraint or *sila*). 2) Mindfulness of the mind extends the practice of 'listening' to body to include 'listening' to thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and consciousness.

6.2.2 Mindfulness of the Mind

Observing thought, or reflexivity: the mind's awareness of its own movement, is distinct from thinking. A subject cited earlier alluded to the importance of this distinction in stating that he cannot act 'on impulse anymore' because he could 'see the thought process' in his mind. Observing 'how I would create my own suffering in my mind' determined his personal conduct. Sport psychology has identified an important relationship between attention and action in the research on elite runners. Elite athletic performance issues from direct observation, not from thought. Maintaining close and direct contact with what is actually going on in the body, associative runners perform efficiently on the basis of direct and immediate perception of what is actually going on in the body.

Just as the association technique enhances athletic performance, to extend the analogy, mindfulness practice apparently enhances social 'performance'. Some subjects in the study, such as the middle-aged man quoted below, reported that mindfulness promotes good human relations in their daily lives.

> Before I go to work, you know, you sit [in meditation] at home and then you go to work and a couple hours later it 'kicks in'. What kicks in is you're 'right there' and you're able to handle whatever comes up. I have no problems at work because whatever comes to me I can take care of. There's a lot of things that you can say, 'Doesn't bother me in the slightest.' You know? The relations with people work out beautifully because I'm not hitting on them. (Interview #3)

Note the inter-relationship between self-restraint (*sila),* concentration (*samadhi),* and mindfulness (*sati)* in this narrative. By virtue of mindfulness operating in the lifeworld (*sati*) which the subject attributes to his daily meditation (*samadhi*) his social relations (*sila*) in the workplace "work out beautifully." Apparently strength of mind promotes presence of mind which in turn enhances job efficiency and harmonious social relations. Another subject reported that mindfulness—which she describes as "being in the present moment"—brought her into a different relationship to her child. Having taken up Buddhist *praxis* in the past year, she was asked if it had influenced their daily home life.

> With our son in particular, I notice a lot of change in our approach to guiding him instead of ruling him or something. Not that either of us really ever believed ruling him was the way to go, but I get much more into the present moment with him now. Which is what little kids want anyway. They *are* in the present moment. Now if I can just remember that that's all that's important right now anyway, you know? [To] just look at him and talk to him. The first time I did it he was just sucking it up. (Interview #22)

Both examples indicate that presence of mind means being present for other people. The mother could 'be there' for her child because she was not absorbed in mental proliferation. While being 'lost in thought' is not entirely a matter of consumer relations, market consumption certainly promotes such a condition. The self-absorption characteristic of the insatiable consumer, which Campbell (1987) identifies, stands in stark contrast to the presence of mind in mindfulness practice. The significance of presence of mind in social relations suggests how Baudrillard's 'death of the social' thesis might be linked to Campbell's emphasis on fantasy and daydream.

Another female subject's narrative offers a more detailed description of how mindfulness of the mind, and of perception and feeling in particular, contributes to good human relations. On her first ten-day retreat the subject, a 35 year-old physiotherapist, discovered that her perception was just one possible definition of the situation and that her experience of conflict varied with how she framed that situation.

> [My first ten-day retreat] turned meditation from noting all this external stuff [that is, mindfulness practice] to : all this external stuff is my perception of it. The world is what it is, but it's my relationship to it that makes me either suffer or, you know, not suffer. (Interview #6)

The key ontological factor in Buddhist *praxis* is the fact that the mind can be aware of its own movement, of its conditioning. I will refer to this capacity of the mind as reflexivity, which is the understanding that the observer is the observed, as Krishnamurti (1972) puts it. If liberation from one's conditioning is to occur, it is at this point. Discovering that the observer *is* the observed enabled the subject to question the authority of her taken-for-granted definition of the situation. Further in the interview the subject reported she noted how her irritability (mindfulness of feeling) toward a person in the meditation hall mirrored her own uneasiness.

> Someone was fidgeting and I was getting irritated with them. All of a sudden I brought it back, and thought, 'Well, how are you feeling right now?' And I thought, 'God, you kind of hurt too.' The minute I turned it inward and saw, 'You're feeling pain too,' I felt compassion for myself and for this other person. And I thought, 'When we're hard on somebody else it's because that's the part in ourselves that we're not soft to.' (Ibid)

Just as the associative runner 'listens' to his body and relaxes muscles that need to be relaxed, the subject 'listened' to feelings present in the mind, to perceptions operating in the mind, and that reflexivity of mind was the condition for relaxing social tensions. Mindfulness of the mind initiated a transformation of feeling toward and perception of the other. The subject further reported a lifeworld variation of the same theme. Already late for work she suddenly found herself caught in a traffic jam.

> Road rage came up for me. 'Oh, these idiots! They're all stuck! There better be somebody dead up there!' And in that moment, instead of taking that external [stance, I was able] to turn it internally and go, 'God, my head is kind of hard today. You know, I'm always in a rush. And I'm going to be late for work again.' To have self-compassion instead of making it '*them*'—'*They're* making me late!' When I was in that meditative state and felt the rage of being stuck in traffic, and then turning it inward, it's totally liberating. (Ibid)

The act of self-reflection, of questioning the 'facticity' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) of feelings and perceptions, frees the mind from conditioned emotional responses inhering in the subject's a priori definition of the situation. The subject's reified relationship between self and other immediately dissolved in the act of critical self-reflection. The relationship is 'reified' in the sense that what thought created is treated as if it were natural, that is, naturalizing what the mind has in fact constructed. The subject's insight was enlighten-ing in that it unburdened the mind from the weight of a conflict-ridden social perception. The power of mindfulness of feeling was poignantly illustrated in the subject's description of her stressful relation to her father.

> My dad was and still is a raging alcoholic. So when I grew up there was a tremendous amount of anger directed towards him. Anyway, I moved back home after being away for 13 years. And I thought, I forget who said it, 'You finally know that you 're getting to the heart of the practice when you can go and meditate in your own home.' (Ibid)

In contrast to the Shangri-la stereotype of Eastern meditation, the subject's decision to confront her lifelong hostility toward her father illustrates that Buddhist *praxis* is not an escape from lifeworld conflict. On the contrary, as mentioned earlier, the understanding in Buddhist *praxis*, is that the only way *out* is *through* (Goldstein, 1983). The subject's entrenched anger is the self-entrapment from which she sought freedom, the task that had to be taken up, for which she had come to meditate in her own home.

> So I went home and, I mean, he's blotto every night. He's like tripping over things, and my mother's like just shaking her head. But I see him in a new light. There's this compassion that I have because this man is suffering terribly, and this is the way he copes with it. And I suffer too. It's my relationship [to him that counts]. Like I said, things are the way they are, but it's your relationship to them [that is important]. (Ibid).

In terms of moral agency, self-reflection opens a space for an interpretive *praxis* in dissolving the 'facticity' of the social world by virtue of which alternative definitions of the situation become possible. Human relationship remains the existential 'social fact' which can be defined other than in the always already way it has been, freeing the mind from the entrapment of the automatic responses that are always already elicited. The subject's response to her father also exemplifies how self-restraint (*sila*) is the practice of freedom. In this case, as illustrated below, harsh speech was restrained while mindfulness of feeling helped to restrain the urge to retaliate.

> When I first moved there, it was interesting because I saw him with compassion but he would say stuff and I would start to get really [angry]. And in my mind I would immediately [catch myself] as soon as I saw it. I actually saw him as a teacher for me. He's a great teacher for me. Because if I can be in his presence and not [explode], you know, anger comes up and I totally don't [blow up, then] it's liberating, isn't it? (Ibid)

Through mindfulness of the mind, the subject no longer immediately acted on the feeling of automatic hostility toward her father. In light of the analogy between the associative technique used by elite athletes and mindfulness practice, the subject's voluntary self-restraint is clearly an improvement in social 'performance'. However, mindfulness did not enhance the relationship she has always had with her father but virtually ended it. The subject's father has become her 'great teacher', she finally left home as an 'en-lightened' individual no longer burdened by the anger against her father, the weight of a lifelong conditioned emotional response.

Critical self-reflection is similar to Foucault's (1990) description of critical history which aims to discover how we have become trapped by our own history. The analogy then between athletic and social performance reveals an important difference here. Monitoring the body improves the associative runner's athletic performance, generating a successful version of the status quo. Mindfulness of the mind, in the case of the subject, did not perpetrate an already existing state of affairs but was a break in the continuation of status quo, a disjuncture that can be considered a revolution in social relationship. However it is foremost a psychological revolution, which is the epi-center of the lifeworld revolution. Mindfulness must be distinguished from insight. The aim of Theravadin Buddhist practice is insight, as indicated in the English translation of *vipassana* as 'insight meditation'. Freedom from self-entrapment, that is, freedom from one's own conditioning, comes through insight and not mindfulness per se. Concentration and mindfulness are meditation practices that are conditions of possibility for insight. Truth is synonymous with freedom in Buddhist doctrine, and both manifest in the liberating insight into a source of disorder in everyday life, constituting a lifeworld revolution.

6.3 Insight: A Lifeworld Revolution

The case histories considered above suggest that 'insight' refers to a two-fold revolution in the lifeworld. An unquestioned definition of the situation is overthrown by a liberating flash of perception. Through the act of self reflection a psychological revolution occurred simultaneously with a transformation in social relationship. What is 'overthrown' is the solidity of an a priori definition of the situation, an existential 'facticity', which makes it possible then to interpret the structure of human relationship in a new way. The solidified social structure sustained by that existential 'facticity', spontaneously dissolves along with the a priori definition of the situation.

Another female subject, a psychologist in her late forties, reported that Buddhist meditation dissolved the existential 'facticity' burdening her mind in relation to her job. The metaphor of being relieved from a state of existential suffocation is a common motif running through the interview data, and surfaces in the narratives in phrases such as "being able to breath again" or as "opening up a space".

> [Meditation] helped me a lot for my work. Often it was as if I could let go of a huge burden...It opened space for me...I noticed that it wasn't all. And it was clear to me that I didn't want to go on with this work...And so this gave me another perspective. It made it smaller. And I noticed there was also something besides work and besides all that. (Interview #34)

The liberating perspective that enabled the subject to see there was more to her life besides her work extended to her relationship with her partner, a relationship that, like her job, did not in fact have the over-riding importance she presumed it to have. In both cases, critical self-reflection dissolved the solidity she had unconsciously attributed to the 'facticity' of her lifeworld.

> Also it helped me to let go of some other personal issues I saw that were so heavy, and I couldn't resolve them. [I had a boyfriend at the time.] It was similar. [The relationship] appeared smaller, and I also got the idea that this is something that can be dissolved. That it's actually not solid either. So, you know, it helped me when I had got stuck. And then I could move again. So I breathe again. (Ibid)

The next subject's story summarizes in a single narrative the key points pertaining to the Buddhist practices of concentration and mindfulness that have been discussed in this chapter. The subject fit the stereotype of a 'traditional' white-haired grandmother. However, in contrast to that stereotype, after five years of Buddhist meditation, she decided to divorce her husband of thirty-five years.

> This [practice] has been very helpful to me. I used to bottle it in, and I developed an ulcer [last year]. And then I said, 'My body's telling me something. So I better [make] some changes.' And I did. I told him I wasn't coming back. But that is new to me: to make up my mind by myself. (Interview #5)

This is the same subject cited earlier who reported that she felt like her 'batteries' were being drained since her husband had retired. Although she found concentration practice the most helpful to 'recharged' herself, the subject reported she was not able to meditate at home. The power relations constituting the subject as 'perfect' wife and mother in a patriarchal household, were inscribed on the body as an ulcer.

> I would also try to get at least an hour of meditation at home in the evenings. Of course he had the television going all the time and I never found the time. Or he couldn't do without the programs for me to have an evening meditation quietly in the home...It did not work for me to combine the practice as a lay person in the normal family household setting. I was not able to do that. I felt like the house is closing in on me. And so I said, 'I really need to get away. I just can't stay there any more.' (Ibid)

It is instructive to consider here the link between material circumstances and consciousness in Marx's conception of anthropological *praxis*. The dull-mindedness to which the subject was accustomed, as she reports below, correlates to the alienating conditions of her home life. The subject's self-reflection, issuing in part from her spirited engagement in yoga and meditation but also from meaningful conversations with her older brother, operated as a counterforce to the alienated consciousness generated by the alienating activity of her home life. The subject reported that concentration practice helped most to lift the dull-mindedness that she regarded to be an effect of her marital relationship. *Samadhi*, defined earlier as strength of mind, was effective in subverting the dull-mindedness. Dull-mindedness obscured the subject's relationship to her self (to her own body and mind) while it simultaneously obstructed her capacity to communicate with other people.

> And what has helped me the most was concentration meditation. My mind is not as active as other people's. I think my mind is more dull. I have been kind of a bottled-up, closed-in person for quite a while...I am getting to know myself more, to find out how I feel and figuring out how my body feels, and I never did that before...About a year ago I could not have talked to you on this interview because I had a domineering husband that would do all the talking. Then I watched it, and observed it: he would even finish my sentence for me, and he never listened to what I had to say. So I wasn't able to verbalize. I've been working on that.

Strength of mind was a necessary condition for this individual to break out of her imposed subjectivity, the condition for enabling her to create herself, that is, to start to 'know' herself. The last few sentences in the narrative indicate that it was not only concentration practice that freed the mind from subjugation. Mindful observation of her interactions with her husband also helped the subject break out of the bottle of self-entrapment, to refuse to be what she had always been. Her narrative elicits a contrast between mindless consumption and mindful Buddhist *praxis* in the image of her husband sitting on a couch watching television juxtaposed with that of the practitioner sitting in meditation watching her breath. This image suggests that what the consumer consumes is fantasies and daydreams, as Campbell has emphasized. Furthermore, from the Buddhist perspective, it is not the case that it is the consumer that consumes, but that it is the mind that is consumed by self-absorption. Baudrillard claims the death of the social is symptomatic of the 'theft of reality'. However, social death is coextensive with the consumption of the mind, as is vividly conveyed in the image of the subject's husband who "couldn't do without the programs for [her] to have an evening meditation quietly in the home." In the agonistic interplay of the operation of power and the movement of freedom, to return to Foucault's (1983b) outlook, it is interesting to note how subjectivity was being constituted in this particular case by relations of power.

> My husband thinks I've been brain-washed. He doesn't understand. I think he lost control over me and it's frightening him. I mean, I can understand it. I took care of him for so many years and now he's on his own. Of course he wants me to come back, you know, and be the same. And he would say some nice words: 'I forgive you everything. Just turn into the person you were before.' I said, 'I don't think I can do that.' And I can't blame my family to be upset about it either. They say, 'This is not you!' and I say, 'Yeah, I know but I feel like this is something I have to do otherwise I feel like I'm not living. I'm more like vegetating. And time is precious. You never know how long you'll be on this earth.

The associative runner analogy is once again called into question: since refusing her own subjectivity initiated a revolution in social relationship within the subject's family circle, mindfulness of the body did not improve social performance in so far as it did not generate a more polished version of the status quo. It ruptured the status quo. The analogy also fails in so far as athletic performance is other-oriented, being predicated on social comparison, whereas the subject does not compare herself to anyone else. Finally, the subject's refusal is not geared to social distinction but to social death[58] whereas elite runners embellish their social identity through the association technique. Through mindful observation, the subject dissolved her social identity.

The above narrative demonstrates the complementary relationship between *samadhi* and *vipassana*. Concentration meditation helped the subject to cut through dull-mindedness yet also gave her enough strength of mind to both find out how her body feels and how she herself thinks and feels, which in turn helped her to make important decisions by herself "without guidance from another" (Kant, 1971: 41).

In the synergistic complementarity of *samadhi* and *vipassana,* concentration on the breath catalyzes mindful awareness of the body which enhances mindfulness of the mind. It is by virtue of that synergism that Buddhist meditation tends to revolutionize everyday life rather than to perpetuate the status quo. In summary, Buddhist meditation involves the practices of concentration (*samadhi*) and mindful self-observation (*sati*), which have been described as strength and presence of mind, respectively. These practices are aimed at bringing about insight, a psychological transformation which is apparently accompanied by a transformation in social relationship. Concentration and mindfulness are not sufficient for insight, however. Self-investigation is also necessary. The thrust of Buddhist meditation practice is to train the mind. Training the mind is not the aim in the socialization of the insatiable consumer who is conditioned to seek excitation rather than tranquility, to ignore the body rather than to listen to it, to pursue fantasy and daydream rather than to observe the mind, to be self-absorbed rather than to be critically self-reflective. In each case, relations of consumption facilitate self-entrapment whereas it is the freedom from self-entrapment that is the aim of the critical self-reflection, the key liberating factor in Buddhist *praxis*. Of the three aspects of Buddhist *praxis*, the practice of critical self-reflection is particularly absent in the insatiable consumer.

Chapter Seven: Self-Critique

Right Understanding

7.1 Radical Self-Critique and Insight

Self-restraint and strength of mind constitute the first two aspects of Buddhist *praxis*. The third aspect is self-critique, or critical self-investigation. Self-critique aims at a liberating knowledge of how one has become trapped in one's own history. The self-entrapment being alluded to here is concisely exemplified in the narrative of a female subject, a middle-aged married woman.

> I have a lot less worry and fear. You know: If I'm going to fly, I have to worry about that. Then I gotta worry: 'Who's birthday is it?' and 'Did I remember her birthday?' I mean I used to have a lot. If my husband was going to leave for a weekend: 'Now you call me when you get there. And then, in the middle, call me. And then, when you're getting ready to leave, call me. And then, if anything comes up, of course, call me.' You know? Like that's going to make any difference. I'm very much like my mother in that regard. I see directly where that came from. So now when she's still doing that, I so much want for her to be able to let that go. [So] there's a lot of freedom. I'm already tasting this liberation (Interview #22).

This subject's narrative illustrates how self-critique involves a kind of 'existential post-structuralism' through which the individual is able to identify her self-entrapment within the network of social relationship without reference to a transcendental subject at the center of the investigation who exists apart from that network. In observing the existential fact of her 'worry and fear', this individual did not discover her 'true self'. Instead of finding *who* she really is (a worried and fearful *being)* she discovers *what* she actually is (an entangled *way of being* in the world). By perceiving her subjectivity to be historically contingent, she is able to free her 'self' from the self-entrapment into which she had been socialized by her mother, who is still entrapped.

Self-critique aims at a particular type of knowledge, a liberating knowledge, which in Theravada Buddhist *praxis* is called 'insight'. Just as the task of philosophy for Marx was not just to interpret the world but to change it (Giddens, 1990), the purpose of self- investigation is not to 'discover oneself' but to free the mind from what might be called the 'fundamental attribution error' of the human mind. Attributing any aspect of body or mind to an unchanging essential separate self is the fundamental attribution error in Buddhism, an error presumed to be a trans-historical and trans-cultural misperception.

> What lies buried deep within us is our belief that the [body and mind] form our self. From time immemorial, whatever our language, whatever our race...we believe that these things are us, are ours; that they are a being, our own self...These assumptions lie buried deep within us. The Buddha thus teaches to investigate. We investigate these things so as to see their truth clearly and then to uproot our mistaken assumptions and attachments that they are the self. We do this for the sake of freedom and for nothing else. (Nanasampanno, 1997: 176-7).

Mindfulness (*sati*) is a necessary condition for insight. In addition to mindful investigation of mind, *sati* also refers to mindfulness of the Buddhist doctrine (*dhamma*). Although *sati* is usually translated as 'mindfulness,' another translation for *sati* is 'recollection', that is, 'to remember' (Gunaratana, 1992). It is necessary to remember the Buddha's teaching, just as it is necessary to remember to be mindful of body and mind, so that Buddhist *praxis* requires one to recall and reflect on the teachings. Just as the self as an object of mindful observation must be investigated, the teachings as an object of mindfulness must also be investigated. The doctrine is not to be accepted, or rejected for that matter, until it has been thoroughly interrogated. Practitioners are obliged to investigate the validity of Buddhist *theoria* in daily life, which represents the third aspect of Buddhist *praxis*: the investigation of the self and the teachings (*panna*). The investigation of the self, that is of the body and mind, is quite clear in the above narratives and needs no further comment. In regard to the critical investigation of the Buddhist doctrine, it is perhaps useful to juxtapose the *Kalama Sutta* (which describes the Buddha's injunction in regard to the acceptance of religious teachings, including his own) with Kant's essay *What is Enlightenment* (see below). This comparison demonstrates the affinity between Western critique and the value placed on critical thought in Buddhism.

What Should We Believe?

Do not accept anything through revelation.
Do not accept anything through tradition.
Do not accept anything through hearsay.

Do not accept anything because
it accords with the scriptures.
Do not accept anything through
having considered the reasons.
Do not accept anything through logic.

Do not accept anything because
one is convinced of some theory.
Do not accept anything through
the testimony of some reliable person.
Do not accept anything thinking,
'This is a respected preacher.'

But only after observation and analysis,
when you find that anything
agrees with reason and is conducive
to the benefit of one and all,
then accept it and live up to it.

-The Buddha, *Kalama Sutra*

What Is Enlightenment?

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without direction from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere Aude! 'Have courage to use your own understanding!'--that is the motto of enlightenment.

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a proportion of men, long after nature has released them from alien guidance..., nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity, and why it is so easy for others to establish themselves as their guardians. It is so easy to be immature.

- Kant (1784)

7.2 Critique & Self-Critique

The step to maturity, as Kant indicates, is less a matter of intellect than of courage. The enlightened individual is one who, having come of age, 'dares' to use his own reason rather than depending on others to do his thinking for him, like a child who is capable of walking yet depends on his parents to carry him around. However, it may not necessarily be laziness or lack of courage that obstructs the capacity to think for oneself. In the last chapter, we observed that one subject's subordination in a traditionally patriarchal family structure made it extremely difficult for her to think independently. Nonetheless, her 'step to competence' also involved the courage that Kant deemed to be a requisite for enlightenment, a certain fearlessness that is the condition for critical reflection. While Kant emphasizes courage to inquire, the Buddha emphasizes that one must 'live up to' the imperatives of free inquiry. The subject not only had the courage to inquire but the courage to act on her own recognizance. Courage is not just a matter of understanding for oneself but also of acting from that understanding. If there is no action, according to Krishnamurti (1973), then there is no understanding.

The step to maturity, as Kant points out, not only concerns the individual, but all parties involved within some specific form of social relationship. Enlightenment marks a break with the social structure that fosters immaturity. By virtue of the 'resolve and courage' to think critically 'without guidance from another', Kant's enlightened individual no longer colludes in the infantilizing social structure that sustains 'self-imposed immaturity'. An individual's release from 'self-imposed immaturity' is therefore always a social act. However, according to the Kalama Sutra the capacity to act is not based on reason alone, as it is for Kant, but on critical self-observation. As the Sutra states, the mature use of reason does not precede but follows from 'observation and analysis'. The above narrative supports this sequence of self-observation, investigation, and then action.

In Buddhist practice, empirical investigation precedes self-critique: Mindful observation is the condition for rational moral thought, what Kant calls practical reason.

However, just as critique is not yet social action (Foucault, 1988b), self-critique is not yet psychological revolution. Self-inquiry, the courage to question the authority of one's own assumptions, does not constitute insight. While the direct insight that en-lightens the mind is predicated on self-restraint, concentration, mindful self-critique, it is the synergistic interaction of the latter two practices that is the focus of this chapter. The objective here is to specify how concentration and mindfulness interact with self-critique as conditions for a psychological revolution where enlightened thought is inseparable from enlightened action.

7.3 Three Necessary Conditions for Insight

To begin, it is important to re-emphasize the distinction between the two kinds of peace in Buddhist practice. The peace of mind that concentration practice brings about is entirely different from the peace of mind that takes place through self-inquiry. Concentration practice tranquilizes the mind, engendering a serene state more accurately described as a calm mind rather than a peaceful mind (Chah, 1992a, b). Relentless critical self-reflection, or self-investigation, leads to peace of mind. The distinction between calm and peace is comparable to the difference between the physical relaxation after exercise and the sense of relief after solving a difficult problem. Nonetheless, a minimum level of concentration must first be established for self-inquiry. A quiet mind is a necessary condition for the mindful observation that is the existential basis for self-critique.

7.3.1 A Quiet Mind

The interaction between concentration practice and self-critique is illustrated in the narrative of another subject, a physically fit middle-aged business woman who had been engaged in Buddhist practice for the past four years. This individual began to meditate at a time when she was experiencing marital problems.

> My husband and I were having very serious problems based on a severe depression of his that he was unwilling to get any help for. For over a decade he was trying to do his own work which, while he's a very talented person he's not a very organized person, so he just couldn't get things off the ground. So it was just a very difficult time for him. And he, I know, carries a lot of shame now which he can't seem to put down, but he literally earned no money during all of that time. And I was the breadwinner, had a very, very high-stress job. (Interview #25)

Although the pressure of her high-stress job was exacerbated by increasingly strained marital relations, the dilemma that confronted this subject was not one she was inclined to try to solve outside her relationship with her husband.

> So we were getting more and more estranged in terms of the work, although I was being very, very successful and needed the money in order to support my family because I had two children in college. I was putting everyone through school and everything. So there was a lot of stress in my life and not anyone I could really talk to because I've never been one to want to burden friends or things of that sort about that. I mean I have certain friends that I can talk to on a friend level, but always felt that those things about my husband, they were so personal. He deserved his privacy. (Ibid)

Although not dominated by her husband, the subject was the target of his persistent hostility and resentment. It is within the context of this interpersonal conflict that she began to meditate.

> I began sitting on my own. I just started giving myself a half hour here, a half hour there. Light a candle, and sit down, and just be very quiet. And of course he was very uncomfortable about it in the house. It was hard for me sometimes to have privacy to do this. (Ibid)

What first struck the subject as soon as she began to meditate was what she calls the 'quiet head' that results when the mind is not being drained by the incessent chatter of discursive thought. It is this same silence of mind borne of concentration practice that enabled the previous subject, who was dominated by her husband to 'recharge' her 'batteries'.

> So what I found is that almost immediately there was such a calm. I used to have all that chatter, and it was very exhausting to have all that noise up there all the time. It's wonderful to walk around with a quiet head. And where I've had all of these thoughts, ten thousand! It was just such a really relaxing (Ibid).

The subject quickly acknowledged an important distinction between the silent mind beyond the noise of thought and physical relaxation. Although psychological stress often dissipates after physical exercise, it does not necessarily always abate, as demonstrated in this case.

> I'd been a long-distance runner for a long time too, and when I was dancing I was dancing for six hours a day. I'm used to having a very high level of endorphins, so I've been used to being relaxed. But then there's stress from another level, you know, an emotional level which made me very sad. And so, all of that began to even out. (Ibid)

7.3.2 Mindfulness and Self-Critique

Physical exercise did not 'even out' the subject's emotional distress; nor did the serenity of a quiet mind. Although concentration practice produces physical and psychological relaxation, it does not alleviate emotional distress any more than a dissociative runner alleviates the physical distress he tries to ignore. The silent mind is not peace of mind, in other words, but rather a condition for its possibility. Samadhi practice provides the cognitive energy demanded for critical self-inquiry. The quiet mind opens up a 'breathing' space for *panna*, sometimes translated as 'discriminating wisdom' which the subject refers to as a 'better understanding of [her] actual priorities.' In 'sitting and doing nothing' she discovered that

> there was such an understanding. A lot of my friends, they'll listen and then they'll say, 'Well, but, you know, it's almost like a license to be lazy.' No. Not at all, because you have such a happiness. You have such a light foot. What happens when

> you sit is that you have a better understanding of your actual priorities. When you see those things that are just ridiculous, it helps you to identify what is important and what isn't important. (Ibid)

The narrative demonstrates the synergism between silence of mind and self-critique, that is, between the calm mind engendered by concentration practice and the capactity to get one's priorities straight. When the mind is not still and collected, it is difficult to ascertain what one should or should not be concerned about in the lifeworld. While this illustrates the importance of concentration practice for self-investigation, there is an equally important relationship between mindfulness practice and self-critique; it should be noted that all three are interdependent. The dynamic interaction between mindfulness and self-critique that concentration practice makes possible was cited earlier in the narrative of the twenty-one year old university student who asserted the liberating effect of self-investigation: "I became a lot more aware of how I would create my own suffering in my mind...and it had a really freeing effect on me" (Interview #39).

Although tranquility attracts Westerners to Buddhist meditation and Buddhist meditation is commonly perceived in term of tranquility meditation, tranquility meditation is in fact common to many religious traditions, both Eastern and Western (Feist, 1995). Therefore the practices that more accurately identify the distinctiveness of Buddhist *praxis* are mindfulness and self-critique. Nevertheless all three are necessary conditions for insight. The specific form of market consumption the university subject confronted in terms of the *tanha* model is the desire to avoid meaningless social existence, that is, the unconscious repression of nihilism.

> I see [meditation] as something that can allow me to understand myself and be in touch with myself in a deeper level. Because I can see how most of the time people are coming from a very superficial part of [themselves]. We get so caught up in life that, I can see now how years could go by and all of a sudden you could end up like, you know, 'What am I doing here? How did this happen? How did I end up doing this in my life?' And I don't want that to happen. I look at my family and I can see that. Both my parents ended up that way. And, you know, it's just like the years go by. I haven't entered the work force yet. But I can see how you can really get caught up in work and that kind of thing, and time just goes by so fast. (Ibid)

This passage supports the prior subject's assertion that meditation had helped her to get her priorities straight, to whose narrative we now return. The subject describes how she managed to think for herself under trying marital circumstances[59].

> This [practice] is where my focus is. And what I do know is that such clear understanding about so many issues has come my way. Like, for example, with my husband, you know, this terrible strain and stress. When I married, I was like everybody else: married for life. This was a very serious consideration, to consider a separation. While I knew my husband had many problems and I was the target of his own personal anger, it's very hard because there's no way of

> protecting yourself from an anger that has nothing to do with you. So that was very hard. (Interview #25)

The interaction between concentration and self-critique led to an insight that the subject had in regard to her relationship with her husband. What is critical in her narrative is that it is the relationship that is problematic not the people involved, and it is the relationship that she abandons, not her husband per se.

> So I remember sitting, in the middle of the night, and I said to myself, 'What is it that you like so much about this person who does not treat you the way you want to be treated?' And I said, 'I like the way he treats other people. And he's horrible toward me because I'm the target.' And so then, just as clear as a bell, I said, 'Well, then just become another person.' I mean it was just so simple. And so I thought about it. I said, 'That's exactly it.' So the next day I shared with him that I wanted a separation, and that was devastating to him. You know, he wasn't expecting that or anything. But he has grown magni[ficently]. I think it was the most wonderful gift, next to our children, I'd probably ever given this person. And he's gone forth. He's gotten a wonderful job. He had structure in his life. He got security now, all of these things, and he's just starting to blossom. It's just so nice just to see this healthiness starting for this person. (Ibid)

7.4 Insight & the Culture of Consumerism

The subject's action did not issue from the advice of an 'expert authority'; she acted through the agency of her capacity to think through and solve her own problems. Earlier on in the interview the subject reported how she had similarly resolved long-standing emotional distress from the physical abuse she had suffered as a child at the hands of her mentally-ill mother. The practice of self-critique may be thought of as an existential poststructuralist critique. Existential in the sense that the focus is on concrete conditions of the lifeworld and on the abilitity to respond (response-ability) to the dilemmas posed by contradicitions in those conditions. Responsibility presupposes the ability to respond effectively for which the minimum condition is strength of mind. Post-structural, in the sense that the focus is on social relationship rather than on isolated individuals who are essentialized as either 'victims' or 'victimizers'. For example, the subject does not demonize her husband. Neither resolving one's own problems nor acting on one's own recognizance appear to be societal norms in consumer society. These cultural norms were evident in the social expectations the subject encountered in regard to her response to her ex-husband and to her formerly abusive mother. It was apparently not socially acceptable that the subject did not evince bitterness nor resentment toward either of them.

> There are many people who find my attitude towards my husband to be so surprising. You know, they think that possibly I'm not sincere because it's too out of context for most people in our society. And yet it's easy to feel loving and compassion [toward him] because this is a very good person. And his problem is with me, in terms of how it makes him feel guilty and shameful, and things of that sort. [The same social attitude applies to] the things I told you in the beginning about my mother being so physically abusive, and things of that sort. [I was] able to be forgiving, but the psychologist [says]: 'There has to be problems here!' They want you to, to [have that problem.] You have to have the

> problem. But if you've worked it out, it's resolved. You don't feel those things. (Ibid)

Apparently, to actually resolve lifeworld problems, as this narrative suggests, runs counter to the infantilizing relations of consumption since it undermines the 'self-imposed immaturity' upon which consumer culture seems to be predicated. Actually resolving the problems of everyday life is not normal in consumer society where one is expected to remain immature, to remain the perpetual victim bemoaning one's fate. Consequently, since he is not expected to master his own life, the consumer is a master of self-pity.

> If somebody had a brain tumour, they would be forced to get help. But when one's depressed [in] our society, 'Oh! She's so depressed!' or 'He's so depressed!' As if that's okay. You know, as if that's okay. We just accept that. And it's so sad, because it doesn't have to be that way. So, I mean, we've become a Prozac world. Why? You know? Again, because I think people, they want erasers. They don't want to take time to sit. Heck, they might like themselves. Then what do they do? <laughs> (Ibid)

The subject's remark about people wanting 'erasers' is congruent with the third aspect of the Buddhist concept of desire used to define consumption: repressed nihilism, the unconscious desire to *not* want to face the meaninglessness of one's social existence. To erase, that is, to forget, this unpleasant existential fact is perhaps what underlies the normalcy of depression in the 'Prozac world' of consumer culture. Although self-critique appears to be less emphasized in Theravadin meditation centers in the west which seem to lay a greater stress on mindfulness and concentration (Goldstein, 1983. Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987), the core of Buddhist practice is nonetheless critical self-investigation and without which mindfulness and concentration have little significance. In contrast to the perpetual concern with self-image that infuses the socialization of the insatiable consumer, mindful self-critique is concerned with right relationship and not impression management. Insight into right relationship evidently launches right action as an immediate spontaneous response that jettisons self-imposed immaturity and coincides with peace of mind.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In exploring how modern Buddhist *praxis* relates to postmodern consumer society, this dissertation has proceeded through four interrelated themes: Buddhism, consumerism, *praxis*, and modern Buddhist *praxis*. How modern Buddhist *praxis* pertains to the socialization of the insatiable consumer was the central concern. The first theme focused on the distinctiveness of Theravadin Buddhism as a moral worldview by comparing and contrasting it with Kantian ethics and the Twelve Step Program in terms of how desire, moral agency, and the self are differently constituted within each of these interpretive frameworks. The individual is the source of moral agency in both Buddhism and Kantian ethics. However, in Buddhism, the individual's moral agency issues from direct insight into desire rather than being founded upon the assumption of an ahistorical subject of moral reason, as it is in Kantian ethics. The importance of personal experience is common to Buddhism and the Twelve Steps perspective; both emphasize a critical awareness of one's immediate existential circumstances. However, unlike its function in the Twelve Steps Program, critical reflection on personal experience in Buddhist practice is not used to solidify an autobiographical self. Buddhism is radically different from these two interpretive frameworks in that Buddhism does not posit a dualistic relationship between desire and the individual. Since the understanding of desire is the condition for the individual's enlightenment, the understanding of the postmodern condition of the insatiable consumer is the apotheosis of modern Buddhist *praxis*.

The second theme built upon the Buddhist concept of desire. The *tanha* model of consumerism was constructed by amalgamating selected aspects of three sociological theories of modern consumption. The *tanha* model provided the theoretical framework for exploring the relation between modern Buddhist *praxis* and consumerism. For example, social nihilism as a driving force for insatiable consumption was vividly illustrated in the narrative of the subject in Chapter Five who described himself as a 'hard drinking, hard fighting, whore chasing,' biker from hell. Similarly, the role of fantasy and daydream in perpetuating the insatiability of consumption was illustrated by the narrative of the subject in Chapter Six who stated that "even though I still wrestle with cravings, it passes really quick. And it's almost like if I don't think about it, it's not even real. It's not even there" (Interview #9).

Here, the distinction between directly observing the mind on the one hand and becoming absorbed in fantasy & daydream on the other hand indicates how modern Buddhist *praxis* runs counter to the socialization of the insatiable consumer. Finally, the third aspect of the *tanha* model stipulates that consumerism involves compulsive social comparision whereas Buddhist *praxis* directs the individual's attention to critical self-reflection not social comparison. Again, Buddhist *praxis* runs counter to to the socialization of the consumer.

The third theme was a careful consideration of the concept of praxis. Marx's theory contains three types of *praxis*: *Anthropological praxis* refers to the view that action generates consciousness. This principle underlies the Buddha's claim that observing moral restraint is relatively easy because it is simply a matter of taking care of the mind. Since action generates consciousness, one is careful about one's actions. *Reflexive praxis* refers to the relentless criticism of all existing conditions. Critical self-refection in Buddhism limits relentless criticism to the lifeworld, that is, to one's own immediate circumstances, and not to the entire social structure. Finally, *revolutionary praxis* refers to critique as a material force for catalyzing a social revolution. In Buddhism, the aim of critical self-reflection is not social but psychological revolution. Turning from Marx's to Aristotle's philosophy, the notion of the harmonization of *theoria* and *praxis* facilitated the application of Simmel's concept of culture in this thesis. The Aristotelian concepts of *praxis* and *theoria* were used throughout the dissertation to explore how Buddhist *theoria* as objective culture interfaced with Buddhist *praxis* as subjective culture within the larger objective cultural context of consumer society. Finally, a consideration of Buddhist *praxis* delineated the defining features of Buddhist *praxis* from the perspective of Buddist *theoria*, that is, Buddhist *praxis* as objective culture.

The fourth theme explored modern Buddhist *praxis*, that is, the actual subjective culture of North Americans engaged in Buddhist meditation practice. This explication was taken up with reference to the socialization of the insatiable consumer. The three defining components of Buddhist *praxis* (*sila*, *samadhi*, and *sati-panna*) were considered through selected narratives to identify salient features of the contrast between modern Buddhist *praxis* and consumerism. Central aspects of modern Buddhist *praxis* apparently run counter to key features characterizing the socialization of the insatiable consumer: While concentration practice calms the mind, consumerism excites it, by promoting fantasy and daydream which foster self-absorption rather than self-investigation. The practices of fantasy and daydream contrast with the practice of self observation, that is, with mindfulness of body and mind, demarcating a crucial distinction between thinking and observing thought that differentiates the insatiable consumer from the modern practitioner. Consumerism undermines sense restraint whereas Buddhist *praxis* promotes it as the practice of freedom. Market consumption perpetrates an obsession with self image and invidious social comparison, whereas critical self-reflection directs one's attention to the direct observation of body and mind rather than to an obsession with self-image. These points of contrast have been charted in Figure 6.

A major limitation of this thesis is an unconventional use of data. The data were not used here for empirical analysis but used instead to get an impression of Buddhist *praxis* as it is understood by North Americans actually engaged in it. The key concepts that have been identified here could be used later for conducting empirical research of this new religious movement. For example, the life history data provide terminology meaningful to Buddhist practitioners that could be used to construct a questionaire. More significantly, to assess the development of subjective culture, life history interviews could be more rigourously structured to focus on the three components of Buddhist *praxis*.

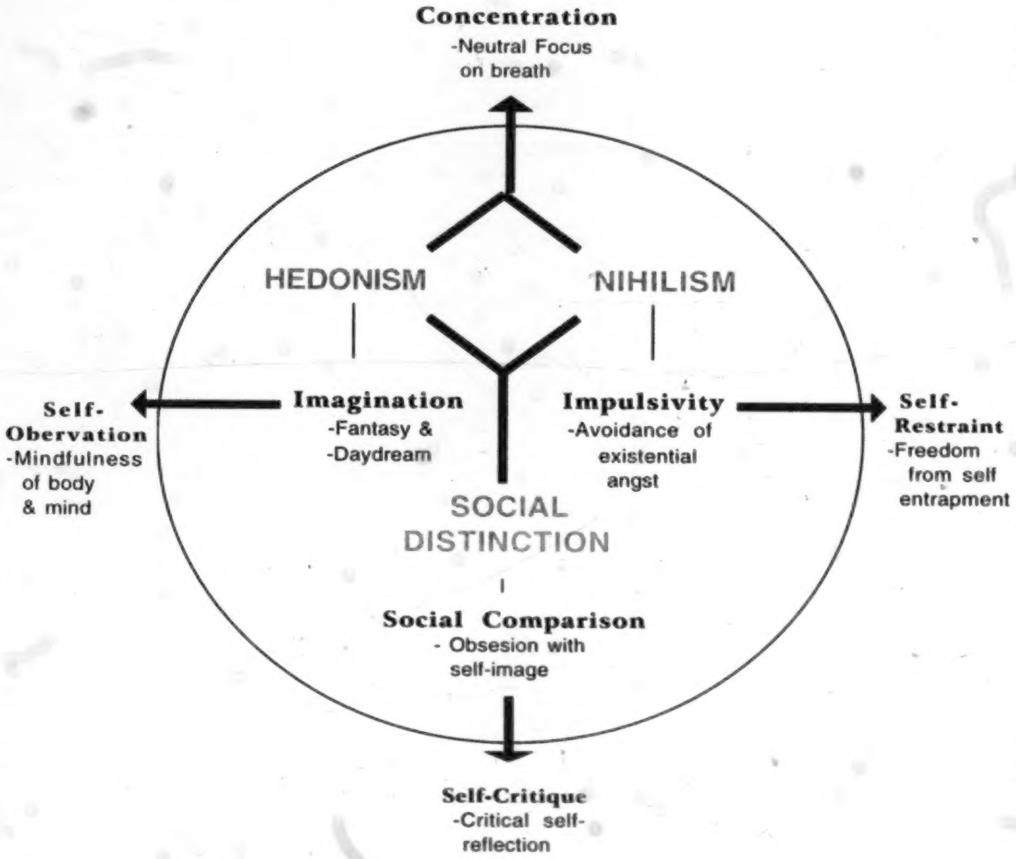
Concentration
-Neutral Focus on breath
HEDONISM
NIHILISM
Self-Obervation
-Mindfulness of body & mind
Imagination
-Fantasy &
-Daydream
Impulsivity
-Avoidance of existential angst
Self-Restraint
-Freedom from self entrapment
SOCIAL DISTINCTION
Social Comparison
- Obsesion with self-image
Self-Critique
-Critical self-reflection

Figure 6. The interface between modern Buddhist praxis & characteristic features of the insatiable consumer as stipulated in the *tanha* model of consumerism.

What then is the cultural significance of modern Buddhist *praxis* as a contemporary form of subjective culture? Perhaps the most striking contrast between consumerism and modern Buddhist *praxis* is that the critical self-reflection intrinsic to Buddhist *praxis* is virtually absent in the insatiable consumer, indicating a cultural break between postmodernity and the ethos of the Enlightenment. As conveyed in Rousseau's advice to "quit your childhood, my friend, and wake up!" (quoted in Schopenhauer, 1969: 1), it is human maturity that was the cultural ideal of the Enlightenment. Buddhist praxis apparently continues the Enlightenment project, therefore the engagement of North Americans in Buddhist meditation practice can be considered a modern rather than a postmodern phenomenon. Running counter to consumerism, the critical self-reflection promoted in Buddhist *praxis* promotes human maturity through the interaction of self-restraint (*sila*), strength of mind (*samadhi*), and mindful self-critique (*sati-panna*). Critical self-reflection is in this sense congruent with the 'step to maturity' that Kant extolled as the ethos of Western Enlightenment. It is also in this sense that market consumption represents an absence of critical self-reflection. Rather than self-critique, the self absorption characterizing market consumption is an obstruction to human maturity.

Although postmodernity is the anti-thesis of Buddhist *praxis*, the postmodern condition may have nonetheless benefited the growth of modern Buddhist *praxis*. Theravada Buddhism rapidly developed as objective culture in the West over the past few decades. During the same period, postmodernity has also emerged in the intensification of consumer culture. This hyper-commercialism probably facilitated the rapid objectification of Theravada Buddhism in the West. For example, an enormous number of excellent English translations of Buddhist teachings are now available to millions of North Americans on the Internet. Theravada Buddhism is now accessible as objective culture to many North Americans who would not otherwise have come into contact with it.

The objective culture that is the condition for Buddhist praxis consists of goods and services such as books and tapes on meditation, internet sites, retreat centers, and so forth. However, subjective culture does not necessarily co-vary with objective culture. The spread of Theravada Buddhism in the West, as objective culture, does not necessarily indicate a corresponding increase in modern Buddhist praxis as subjective culture. Whether there has in fact been an increase in subjective culture among Western practitioners would be an interesting focus for further research.

Another way in which the postmodern condition may have promoted the spread of modern Buddhist *praxis* is that hypercommercialism has generated popular reactions against consumerism, as exhibited in the voluntary simplicity movement, a popular rejection of consumerism which has become widespread in North America over the past twenty years (Celente, 1997). The cultural climate within which voluntary simplicity has blossomed may have also made Buddhist *praxis* more appealing to North Americans than it might otherwise have been. Whether the voluntary simplicity movement itself has contributed to the growth of modern Buddhist *praxis* would be another interesting area for future research.

What then is the overall significance of this study? The significance of this study within the discipline of sociology takes place at three levels: the methodological, the theoretical, and the empirical. At the methodological level, the investigation of Buddhist praxis provides a useful cultural distance from which to investigate consumer society. As mentioned earlier, the transparency of consumerism makes it difficult to critique consumer society. A sufficient distance is required from the blur of that which is too close at hand to allow us to bring it into focus. The investigation of Buddhist praxis provided a corrective lens through which the transparency of consumerism was brought into a sharper focus.

At the theoretical level, the *tanha* model of desire provides an interpretive framework for understanding the cultural significance of westerners engaged in Buddhist meditation. In the study the *tanha* model was a useful frame of reference that incorporated selected elements from three prominent sociological theories of consumerism. This theoretical bridge made it possible to investigate modern Buddhist *praxis* as a new religious movement using the language of its adherents while at the same time maintaining a link to relevant sociological concepts.

At the empirical level, data from an exploratory study of a Buddhist meditation centre was used to explore modern Buddhist praxis on two fronts. First, to investigate whether the central components of Buddhist practice have in fact entered into the everyday lives of western practitioners. That is, to probe the degree of congruity between the "subjective" culture and "objective" culture of North American Buddhism. Second, to gain an initial impression as to how modern Buddhist praxis runs counter to the socialization of the insatiable consumer. Within this latter context, it was suggested that critical self-reflection is the most consequential component of North American Buddhism, and, furthermore, that this aspect of Buddhist practice has a strong elective affinity with the ethos of the Western Enlightenment.

In conclusion, while western individuals engaged in Buddhist meditation may appear out of place in North American society, the new religious movement they represent is a logical continuation of the ethos of the Western Enlightenment. Moreover, not only is modern Buddhist praxis consistent with the cultural heritage of modern society, it in fact legitimates the Enlightenment project in novel and distinctive ways.

Notes

1. Georg Simmel (1858-1918) was a German sociologist and philosopher whose work has been acknowledged to have anticipated key themes in postmodern theory (Frisby, 1990)

2. The popularity of Buddhism in the United States over the past five years is reflected in its prevalence as a recurrent theme in the mass media as, for example, in television commercials, movies about Tibet, and Time magazine cover stories. Whereas Asian thought has influenced western thinkers from the onset of the modern period (Clark, 1997), what is novel is the mass popularity in the reception of Buddhism at this time.

> Buddhism is on America's mind. TV commercials embrace it: Michael Jordon runs to the top of a Tibetan mountain to find the true meaning of sports drinks. A hillside of Buddhist monks meditates on hard drives. The famous, like Richard Gere and Tiger Woods, fight stress with it. . . . I started to notice Buddhism everywhere. *Business Week* was writing long articles about meditation sessions in major corporations on Wall Street. School children and cops on the beat were being encouraged to breathe as a

way to fight stress. Buddhist monasteries and retreat centers were flourishing in out-of-the-way places, and *Newsweek* declared that 'America may be on the verge of Buddhadharma' (Moore, 1997: cover).

3. In addition to the interview data, field notes, participant observation, and a literature research were also a part of the exploratory study.

4. Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) was 'an American institutional economist and radical social thinker. Educated at John Hopkins and Yale universities, Veblen became an iconoclastic figure in economics, criticizing neoclassical orthodoxy for neglecting broader social and cultural issues germane to economics. In books such as *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) and *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904), partly influenced by his wide reading of socialist and Marxist literature, he introduced concepts such as 'conspicuous consumption' and 'ostentatious waste', which became widely familiar (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1994: 739).'

5. Jean Baudrillard is a French social and cultural critic who took up consumerism as his object of analysis long before its recent popularity in sociology. Consumption was the theme of Baudrillard's doctoral dissertation in sociology, *The System of Objects*, which was published in

1968. While reception of Baudrillard's work has had mixed reviews in Anglo-American sociology (see Kellner, 1989, 1994; Gane; 1991), American theorist George Ritzer (1997), more recently echoed the earlier assertion by Rojek & Turner that,"without doubt, Jean Baudrillard is one of the most important figures currently working in the area of sociology and cultural" studies (1993: ix).

6. Colin Campbell, a Reader in Sociology and Head of Department at the University of York, specialized in the sociology of religion but has more recently focused on the sociology of consumption. Campbell (1987) takes a Weberian approach in the theory of consumption that he has proposed.

7. Achan Cha (1918-1992), a renowned Thai monk born in a small village in North-East Thailand, was a novice Theravadin monk between the ages of 9 and 17 then took full ordination at 21. He practiced in the style of the austere Forest Tradition of Achan Mun, wandering through the countryside for many years. In 1954 he was invited back to his home village where he established the Wat Pah Pong forest monastery. Disciples gathered around him in increasing numbers, including many westerners such as the American monk Achan Sumedho and the Canadian monk Bhikkhu Sona, both of whom head Buddhist monasteries in the west, representing two among Wat Pa Pong's many branch monasteries spread

all over the world.

8. Baudrillard (1998) depicts the socially engineered consumer as a 'system of needs' that is a productive force within the 'system of production': the insatiability of the modern consumer is a rationalized 'node' within the system of production without which the system of production could not continue as it is. This necessary node is the insatiability of the postmodern consumer.

9. Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German social philosopher and revolutionary who developed a materialist conception of history and envisaged a global revolution between the capitalists and the proletariat, to be followed by the construction of a classless communist society. The three volumes of *Capital* (1867, 1885, 1894), Marx's greatest work, gave a profound analysis of the capitalist process of production."Marx is the most important figure in the history of socialist thought and his ideas have profoundly changed social life and the social sciences in the twentieth century" (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1994: 735).

10. "Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) , was a German philosopher, scholar, and writer who has had an enormous influence on many strands of 20th century thought, including existentialism and psychoanalysis, and on

authors "as various as Japsers, Heidegger, Mann, Yeats, Foucault, and Baudrillard" (Magnusson, 1990: 1081-2).

11. This is not to imply that the Western practitioners being interviewed had overcome the socialization inculcated by consumer society. The interviews were not conducted in order to ascertain the attained cultivation of the modern individual informed by the 'cultivating object' of Buddhist *theoria*. It remains for future research to investigate the actual status of modern Buddhist *praxis* in this regard.

12. The commodity only interests Marx in so far as it represents the 'economic cell form' of bourgeois society through the analysis of which the capitalist means of production is revealed, just as analysis of the biological cell reveals how the body operates (1954: 8).

13. Although the formally rationalized process of socializing citizens to become consumers can be regarded as a radical cultural shift, it can hardly be considered to be a 'break' from modernity. George Ritzer (2000, 1999, 1998) contests the notion that a postmodern break has taken place since the spread of formal rationality, which Max Weber identified as the key characteristic of modern society, has not disappeared. Rationalization has

extended in fact into the domain of consumption where it now operates in a much more intensified manner than it has in the past. However, a radical *cultural* shift can still be claimed to have occurred since the application of instrumental rationality for the purpose of establishing and regulating consumer demand focuses on the socialization of the consumer whereas instrumental rationality was previously focused on the socialization of the worker, as, for example, in Taylorism and scientific management.

14. Nietzsche's perspectival approach refers to "taking collective interpretive account of what comes to light when [a particular social phenomenon] is approached in many different ways, with eyes differently focused" (Schacht, 1995: 92).

15. Following Kant, Weber distinguished between *formal* and *substantive* rationality (Sayer, 1991). Formal reason denotes the modern rationalization process through which rational 'disenchantment of the world' results in the decline of moral reason (Collins & Makowsky, 1998). Substantive rationality, on the other hand, is what Weber referred to as *wertrational* action "where an absolute end is pursued entirely for its own sake and independently of any prospects of external success" (quoted in Sayer, 1991: 96).

16. According to Kant, "it is impossible to think of anything at all in the world...that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will"** (1998: 7; original emphasis) .

17. In Kantian ethics it is not the consequences of an act but the intention with which the act is carried out that makes it a moral act.

> A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favour of some inclination, and indeed, if you will, of the sum of all inclinations. (Kant, 1998: 8)

18. There is an 'essential' self implied here which is differentiated from inessential 'determined' self-interest. Kantian ethics is therefore founded on the assumption of an essential self, that is, on an ahistorical moral subject.

19. According to McGovern & Dupont, the Twelve Step programs are

"estimated to reach fifteen million Americans and five million other addicted people...throughout the world" with about fifty thousand meetings each week in the United States and ten thousand in the rest of the world (1994: 1).

20. "By candidly telling about their lives, A.A. members gradually build up a new identity as sober alcoholics and compose a meaningful autobiography, a coherent interpretation of the course of their lives. When people join AA, their life most often is shattered and entangled by secrets and lies. Who am I? Why have I committed all these destructive and immoral acts? How did it happen that I wrecked my life and harmed the people closest to me?" (Makela et al., 1996: 164).

21. The lifeworld is a term the German sociologist Jurgen Habermas uses in his model of society (Outwaite, 1994). The lifeworld refers to our experience of everyday life. There are two levels of sociological analysis: the *micro* level of face-to-face interactions and the *macro* level of large-scale societal phenomenon that exist beyond our everyday interactions with other people. The large scale phenomena in Habermas's model refer to the societal subsystems of the state and the economy.

22. It should be noted that Kant himself came from a Pietist background, "a

religious movement which emphasized inner religious experience, self-examination, and morally good works" (Korsgaard, 1998: vii). The moral community which is emphasized in Buddhism and Twelve Steps is perhaps a presupposition in Kantian ethics.

23. Deborah's story is not intended to demonstrate the superiority or inferiority of any of these three ethical worldviews. It would be a mistake, for example, to conclude that the categorical imperative is invalid or that the importance of the moral community is superfluous. Had Deborah become alcoholic and lost what little self-control she had in elementary school prior to her experience with the computer, it is more likely that she would need a moral community to help her overcome her lack of self-control.

24. Nietzsche's concept of the 'will to power' is closer to Kant's practical rationality than to instrumental rationality in so far as Nietzsche "values power not as a means but as a state of being that man desires for its own sake as his own ultimate end" (Kaufmann, 1968: 360).

25. Kant, as previously noted, grew up in a Pietist family which had instilled in him a strong moral character (Korsgaard, 1998). We can therefore presume one's prior socialization within a moral community is

taken for granted in Kantian ethics. Therefore the importance of the moral community must be understood to be a presupposition in Kant's moral philosophy. The vital significance of moral community is not a presupposition in Theravada Buddhism but explicitly recognized to be essential. To be a Buddhist means to take the Three Refuges, that is, to take refuge in the Buddha (the teacher), the Dhamma (the teaching), and the Sangha (the community of practitioners); the third refuge testifies to the great importance attributed to the moral community (Sumedho, 1991). The path of Buddhist *praxis* does not appear in a social void but is at all times situated within a moral community. Therefore, the moral community is at least as important in Theravada Buddhism as it is in the Twelve Step program. Although a moral community does not appear in the excerpt of Deborah's story, we can extrapolate that if Deborah did in fact break her substance abuse habits she no longer participated in the deviant crowd with which she formerly associated.

26. In the exploratory study, a retreat participant reported that in his struggle with craving during the meditation retreat, "it's almost like if I don't think about it, it's not even real. It's not even there" (Interview #9).

27. In regard to theories of mass society, it is interesting to juxtapose Baudrillard's with that of Alexis de Tocqueville (1966 [1835]) in which

modern individualism plays a key role. Mass society refers to a mass society of formally *equal* individuals which, for Tocqueville poses a potential danger in the political realm.

> Since everyone is equal, no one individual has any power, and people must appeal to the only thing above the individual—the state—to do things. ....The overwhelming demand for loyalty is to the nation. Thus, the individualism of a mass society of equals goes together with the total power of the state (Collins & Makowsky, 1998: 61).

Tocqueville regarded the demand for social equality to be an inexorable cultural imperative in modern society, and although his mass theory had its focus on politics it is useful here to extrapolate from Tocqueville's theory and draw a parallel between political and market individualism. Just as the democratic state addresses itself to the *individual's* rights and freedoms, the free market addresses itself to the *individual's* needs, desires, and comfort (Jhally, 1998b). Baudrillard links this individualization process in consumption to the necessity for state control over consumers.

> Only the state's collective constraint is there to halt the exacerbation

> of individualism. Hence the deep contradiction between political and civil society in the 'consumer society': the system is forced to produce more and more consumer individualism which it is at the same time forced to repress ever more harshly. (Baudrillard, 1998: 84)

Market individualism erodes community ties, as Laxer (2000: 56) puts it, because the 'market individualizes, it rarely builds communities.' Laxer's assertion suggests that the threat of market individualism has an elective affinity with Baudrillard's concept of the 'death of the social'.

> Consumption is a powerful element of social control (through the atomization of consuming individuals) but by that very fact it brings with it a need for ever greater *bureaucratic constraint* on the processes of consumption which will as a consequence be exalted ever more and more energetically as the *realm of freedom*. There is no escaping from this circle. (Baudrillard, 1998: 84)

28. Consumption, for Baudrillard, is "a systematic act of the manipulation of signs...In order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign" (Ritzer, 1997). The code can be defined as a controlling system of signs. Objects of consumption are part of this sign system. Thus

we can think in terms of a "discourse of objects," and as a result, everyone is able to "read" and comprehend such communication" (Baudrillard, 1981: 37).

29. Achan Sumedho is a Caucasian American who was born in Seattle in 1934 and received his masters degree in East Asian studies. He ordained as Buddhist monk in Thailand thirty years ago. A year after his ordination he studied closely with the eminent meditation teacher, Achan Chah, for twelve years (Sumedho, 1995). Achan Chah appointed him to be the first Western abbot of a Thai monastery. He is now the head of several Theravadin monasteries in England, New Zealand, and the United States.

30. Freud's concept of repression has been defined as "pushing painful or dangerous thoughts out of consciousness, keeping them unconscious; this is considered to be the most basic of the defense mechanisms" (Zimbardo, 1992: 523).

31. Bhikkhu Nanajivako (1915 -), a Yugoslavian-born Buddhist monk residing in Sri Lanka with a doctorate in Greek and Indian Philosophy from the University of Zagreb in Yugoslavia, states that Schopenhauer incorporated "Indian philosophies, essential especially to Buddhism into his major work, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), to

complete the argument against Kant he began in his dissertation, *on the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1913), a critical review of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Nanajavika, 1988: 3)." Making theoretical use of the Buddhist concept of desire (*tanha*) is therefore not so exotic as it may seem since Buddhist philosophy has already entered the philosophical discourse of modernity through Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, among other western thinkers (Clarke, 1997). Like Foucault (1990), who was a self-proclaimed Nietzschean, Baudrillard has also been influenced by the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher of nihilism (Gane, 1991; Levin, 1996). Since Nietzsche's philosophy has thus had a considerable impact on social theory, it is worth noting that Nietzsche's mentor was Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who was to Nietzsche what Hegel was to Marx, and Schopenhauer was profoundly influenced by Buddhist philosophy.

32. A common form of daydreaming in modern society is the romantic couple motif that appears in advertising. For example, a large Edmonton shopping center once circulated a 10-page flyer featuring an attractive 'young couple' to advertise its merchandise. On the flyer's front cover a tender close-up of the couple's affectionate faces is rendered in subdued light to convey a soft intimacy. Above this image are three short sentences, structured like a verse, the first verse in the brochure:

> Time together
> Gifts of Love
> Simple joys of the season.

In the post-Keynesian era where free labour is hard-pressed for free time, this ideal young couple spends idealized quality time with each other. The 'gifts of love' theme reappears in the last 'verse' in the flyer , entitled 'treasures'.

> There is no greater treasure
> one can receive than a gift
> that is born of the heart.

The young couple does not appear on the facing pages which display instead photographs of products such as chocolates, sweaters, and cd's. Through the emotional gratification of day-dreaming consumers imaginatively buy Christmas gifts that are 'born of the heart' for a romanticized 'other'. As the flyer suggests, there is perhaps no greater treasure for Madison Avenue than that found in marketing daydreams of the romantic couple. The couple's 'objective *raison d'etre* is the consumption of objects', asserts Baudrillard (1996) who notes that married couples "have even been encouraged to buy new wedding rings every year, and to make their relationship 'meaningful' by buying gifts 'together' " (Ibid: 201).

33. Campbell's Romantic Ethic thesis is a polemic against the standard Veblenesque explanation of the first consumer revolution that "modern mass luxury consumption is the consequence of the dissemination downward through society of that way of life which had previously prevailed among a small aristocratic elite" (1987: 33-4). Consumer demand, Campbell contends, was not due to social emulation of the English aristocracy but to a cultural transformation in values and beliefs specific to the English middle classes. Campbell argues that the rise in consumer demand was the result of a radical transformation in the worldview of English middle classes from a Protestant to a Romantic ethic. The sudden rise in demand was the result of a cultural shift in the bourgeois worldview from severe Puritan asceticism to indulgent Romantic hedonism which justified indulgence in luxury consumption.

34. More ironic perhaps is the popular view that Romanticism is associated with moral decadence. Lockridge cites Irving Babbit as a spokesman for this social perception: "There is no such thing as romantic morality," claims Babbit, who viewed the phrase as an oxymoron (1989:

14). This view is itself evidence, counters Lockridge, of the very concern with ethics which preoccupied the Romantics.

> The British Romantics are rarely accused of immoderate virtue [yet] no other group of authors has been so subjected to moral adjudication...I believe this is in good measure the result of the Romantics' own strenuous engagement with the ethical. For better or for worse they have perennially put their readership in mind of such questions (Ibid: 1).

In a study of British Romantic poets from Blake to Byron, Lockridge demonstrates that, contrary to the popular image of the decadent Romantic, the Romantics were centrally concerned with ethics and moral questions.

> More than most other literary figures, the Romantics expressly concerned themselves with ethics and assert its primacy in their own enterprise. I do not imply that British Romantic literature is more ethical than other literature, only that it more adamantly underscores its own ethical concerns (Ibid: 16).

35. Veblen points out that social honour is not only exhibited through

conspicuous consumption but also through conspicuous leisure. What is common to both is "the element of waste" (1979: 85). Therefore the primary feature in the conspicuous demonstration of social prestige is waste, whether it be the waste of time or of goods is secondary.

36. The term 'inner critic' has been taken from the Voice Dialogue work of the clinical psychologists Hal and Sidra Stone who describe it in their Jungian fashion as

> that inner voice that criticizes us and speaks about us in a disparaging way. It makes everything look ugly. Most of us are not even aware that it is a voice or self speaking inside of us because its constant judgements have been with us since early childhood and its running critical commentary feels like a natural part of ourselves. ..[The] Inner Critic is the voice within us that criticizes us, whereas the Judge is the self within us that criticizes other people (1993: 4)

Judgement and self-criticism inhere in the modern mind "constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world" (Bourdieu, 1992: 168). Constant comparison and competition reinforces a despotic social conformity, generating the 'voice' of the Inner

Critic which upholds the tyranny of social norms. However, according to the Stones, the Inner Critic initially emerges as a mechanism for self-protection.

> Tuning in to the Inner Critic is an amazing experience as we begin to hear how powerful and all-pervasive are the judgemental voices that surround us and feed the Critic in our society...[For social survival, the Inner Critic emerged as a disciplinary device] needed to curb your natural inclinations and to make you acceptable to others by criticizing and correcting your behavior before other people could criticize or reject you. (Stone & Stone, 1993: 11).

37. Baudrillard expands on Debord's Situationist critique of consumer society as the *Society of the Spectacle* within which, claims Debord, "use-value is deployed in an abstract and ideological way" (Best, 1994: 48). Baudrillard goes one step further and asserts that use-value never had any 'essential' meaning in the first place.

38. "Marx used the use- versus exchange-value distinction as the basis for his analysis of capitalism. In shattering Marx's essentialism, Baudrillard's criticism of Marx undermines Baudrillard's own critique of consumption since Baudrillard has no basis from which to judge consumerism. While

Baudrillard attacks essentialist theories, like Marxism, Baudrillard himself has no criteria for judging whether the things people do are good or bad" (Gane, 1993: 193). When Baudrillard attempts to remedy this problem by developing his concept of 'symbolic exchange, he is doing exactly what he criticized Marx for, that is, formulating an essentialist theory. The point here is that Baudrillard cannot find a basis for a moral critique.

39. Consumption, for Baudrillard, is "a systematic act of the manipulation of signs...In order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign" (quoted in Ritzer 1997: 80). The code can be defined as a controlling system of signs. Objects of consumption are part of this sign system. Thus we can think in terms of a "discourse of objects," and as a result, everyone is able to "read" and comprehend such communication (Baudrillard, 1981/1972: 37).

40. A sign seen by the author on Highway 16 while passing through Hinton, Alberta on July 7, 2001.

41. It should be noted that it is a general attitude that is being sanctioned. While Baudrillard (1998) agrees wholeheartedly with Galbraith's assessment of the emergence of consumer society, he dismisses Galbraith's view of advertising. According to Galbraith, the function of advertising is

to create artificial needs such that advertisements for a particular product generate a specific need for that product. Baudrillard disagrees that the function of advertising is to create specific needs. Instead, he proposes that the true function of advertising is to create a system of needs that is a logical extension of the system of production. What Baudrillard means by a 'system of needs,' is that "needs are not produced one by one, in relation to the respective objects, but are produced as *consumption power*, as an overall propensity within the more general framework of productive forces" such that needs as a system "are produced as *system elements*, not as *a relationship of an individual to an object* " (original emphases, 1998: 74-5). In short, needs and consumption are an organized extension of the productive forces. From Baudrillard's frame of reference, the insatiability of the modern consumer must be regarded primarily as a productive force, a system of artificial needs that is an organized and logical extension of the capitalist system of production.

42. In the discussion on Marx, I have borrowed here from Bernstein's *Praxis and Action* (1971) .

43. "The Greek term *praxis* has an ordinary meaning that roughly corresponds to 'action' or 'doing', and it is frequently translated into

English as 'practice'. ... Aristotle also uses *praxis* to designate one of the ways of life open to a free man, and to signify the disciplines and activities predominant in man's ethical and political life. When we add that for Aristotle, individual ethical activity is properly a part of the study of political activity in the*polis* , we can say that '*praxis*' signifies the free activity in the '*polis*' "(Bernstein, 1971: ix, x).

44. In *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought*, Clark (1997) states that "throughout the modern period, from the Renaissance onwards, the East has exercised a strong fascination over Western minds as an instrument of serious self-questioning and self-renewal, an external point of reference from which to direct the light of critical inquiry into Western traditions and belief systems" (5-6).

45. "Self' in this context does not refer to an unchanging 'essence' but to the constantly changing body and mind which one mistakenly identifies with as a permanent self. The purpose of self-investigation is to observe that there is, in fact, no abiding self in either body or mind (Nyanaponika, 1969; Schumanm, 1989).

46. The Pali Canon is the Theravadin equivalent of the Christian Bible, but is over ten times the length of the Bible. It comprises the entire

compilation of early Buddhist doctrine.

47. The fourth point refers to the Buddhist path of practice, known as the Eightfold Path: Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Concentration, Right Mindfulness, Right Understanding, Right Thought. Achan Chah summarizes the path as *sila* (morality), *samadhi* (concentration), and *panna* (wisdom) (1996: 6-26). The Eightfold Path does not refer to sequential steps to be followed one after the next but to important factors in Buddhist practice that all operate together to support each other, like a wheel with eight spokes, and may in fact arise simultaneously (Nyanatiloka, 1970).

48. Dr. Jack Engler, a vipassana teacher at the Insight Meditation Center, wrote his dissertation on Theravada Buddhism.

49. Similarly, participants in the Twelve Step program also focus on social interactions when taking 'moral inventory' closely approximate the Buddhist practice of self-reflection.

50. The complementarity between *sila*, *samadhi*, and *sati-panna* constitutes a mutually reinforcing process of increasing refinement within each domain of Buddhist praxis until each of the three components of

Buddhist practice eventually become indistinguishable from each other (Chah, 1996). Since the modern practitioner cannot be presumed to rank even at the level of the entry level *sila,* that is, of the gradual training, it would be unnecessary to discuss the level of *sila* practice that Buddhist monks and nuns attempt to adhere to. The scope of practice here is limited to more ordinary lifeworld examples of Buddhist *praxis*. Most subjects in the study were not monastics and the gradual training seems to be about as much as the average participant would engage in. Nonetheless participants clearly exercised voluntary self-restraint that, according to their self-reports, apparently resolved conflicts in their everyday lives.

51. Foucault defines subjectivity as the procedure of "subjectivization through which one obtains the constitution of a subject," that is, of a subjectivity which is "one of the given possibilities of the organization of a self-consciousness" (1990: 253). The ancient Greeks did not constitute the self as a subject, although the Greeks were nonetheless concerned with the individual and moral action; in contrast, Christianity "appropriates morality by the theory of the subject," as does Kantian ethics (Ibid).

52. As Achan Chah implies in the following statement, it is sense restraint and not self restraint per se that is the focus of *sila*. "Restraint is *sila*. There is the *sila* of sense-restraint: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. ...we

repeatedly indulge in [the senses], delighting in and getting lost in sense objects. (Chah, 1992b: 94-5). In Theravadin terms, the notion of consumption as modern hedonism is conveyed by the Pali term *kamogha* which has been translated as the 'flood of sensuality' (Ibid: 60).

53. In valorizing the metaphysical subject, Romanticism has more in common with Christianity than it does with either Buddhism or Stoicism. While vehemently opposed to the Enlightenment's worship of reason, Romanticism nonetheless championed the Enlightenment's emphasis on individualism (Lockridge, 1989), particularly the individual's moral autonomy, as exemplified by Kant's transcendental subject. Romanticism's exultation of the metaphysical subject may well be the main source of modernity's cultural blind spot in regard to ethical conduct since individualism, as Tocqueville noted, threatens to be absorbed into a pure egoism (Lukes, 1973). This danger is perhaps more readily apparent in another illustration of Romanticism's valorization of the metaphysical subject: its idea of the individual 'genius', a social category that confers upon a person a degree of prestige in the modern world comparable to that of the 'saint' in the medieval world.

> Although it is difficult to identify a romantic philosophy, it is still possible to describe a general 'theodicy', or metaphysical paradigm,

> shared by most romantics...In comparison with earlier theodicies, what distinguished Romanticism was the fact that primary evidence was placed upon the characteristic of creativity. The divine itself was no longer represented as a named, personal God, but as a supernatural force, which, while present throughout the natural world, also existed within each individual in the form of a unique and personalized spirit; that of his 'genius.' (Campbell, 1987: 182).

54. In contrast to the Christian concept of sin, Theravada Buddhism views immoral conduct in terms of ignorance: people simply do not know what they are doing (Goldstein, 1983). One meditation teacher related an incident that occurred in England that conveyed this view: A great fire had broken out in a large asylum one night and, among the inmates who ran out of the burning buildings, many were so bewildered that they ran back into the fire and were consequently seriously injured or killed.

55. "Shangri-la," is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary (1981: 1190) as "an imaginary remote paradise on earth: utopia," a term that was derived from the "imaginary land in *Lost Horizon* (1933) by James Hilton (1900-1954)."

56. The subject's self-mastery illustrates Nietzsche's definition of power as

'self-overcoming': "Nietzsche thought the highest degree of power consists in self-mastery," and equated his concept of the will to power with what he called "the instinct of freedom" (Kaufmann, 1968: 252, 258). Nietzsche's Kantian view of freedom as a human instinct matches the Buddhist view of peace as the natural state of the mind. Freedom (from self-entrapment), power (self-mastery), and peace of mind (instinct to freedom) are therefore inextricably inter-related in Buddhist *praxis*.

57. As Buddhist *praxis*, mindfulness of the body also goes beyond awareness of physical sensations to awareness of whatever you do with the body, the domain of speech and action, so that it is directly linked to personal conduct (that is, to the practice of self-restraint or *sila*).

58. The term 'social death' is not being used in Baudrillard's sense of that phrase, but to the death of her former social identity. The phrase is being used ironically since the subject is stepping out of the 'social death' of a meaningless social relationship.

59. Apparently the difficulty of thinking for your self in an intimate relationship is not something Kant, who never married, took into account in his essay on enlightenment.

Glossary of Pali Terms

Dukkha	1. Pain. Painful feeling which may be bodily or mental. 2. Suffering; ill. The first of the Four Noble Truths, *dukkha*, refers to the unsatisfactory nature and general insecurity of all conditioned phenomena (Nyanatolika, 1970: 54).
Panna	Understanding; knowledge; wisdom; Insight. *Panna* comprises a very wide field. The specific Buddhist knowledge as part of the Eightfold Path to deliverance is insight, that intuitive knowledge that brings about the realization of [ultimate truth] (Ibid: 122)
Samadhi	The Sanskrit term for the Pali 'samatha'. Calm or stability of heart; the training to attain absorbed concentration of mind (Nanasampano, 1995: 208).
Sati	Mindfulness; recollection; often considered with *panna* (Ibid: 209).
Sila	Morality. But it also has a wider connotation in its higher and more subtle levels, for it includes all bodily actions and speech, which are assessed right or wrong, depending on whether they make one's heart less or more [disturbed]. ((Ibid: 210).
Tanha	Craving. This is the chief cause of *dukkha*, (Nanasampano, 1995: 211) and includes i) 'the desire for sense pleasure' ii) 'the desire to get rid of things (Sumedho, 1992: 31) iii) the craving to change and become something else (Nanasampano, 1995: 211); the desire for praise and success (Sumedho, 1992: 31)
Vipassana	Insight of such a type as is deep and effective in 'curing' the defilements [of mind]. It is insight which arises based on *samadhi*, and not just an intellectual exercise (Nanasampano, 1995: 213)

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Appendix: The Three Major Schools of Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism represents the oldest continuous Buddhist lineage that preserves the teachings of the Buddha, going back to the historical Buddha himself (Bodhi, 1994). Of the three major schools of Buddhism, Theravada is considered to be the closest both to what the historical Buddha actually taught and to what the early Buddhist monks actually practiced (Schumann1989). The three major schools of Buddhism--Hinayana, Mahayana, and Tantrayana--are represented by Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism, respectively (Figure 7). All three Buddhist traditions are still extant not only in Asia but now also in the West, where Theravadin is least familiar. Theravada Buddhism is the major exponent of the Hinayana school. Theravadin meditation centers and forest monasteries began to appear in North America in the late 1970s, exposing large numbers of westerners to Theravadin Buddhist practice (Moore, 1997). A decade ago, Morreale (1988) listed thirty-nine Theravadin meditation centers and one monastery in the United States offering retreats ranging from half a day up to three months in duration, while in Canada there were five centers listed but no monastery. Today Dharmanet International (2000) lists thrity-five Theravadin meditation centers and four monasteries in the U.S.; four meditation centers and two monasteries in Canada.

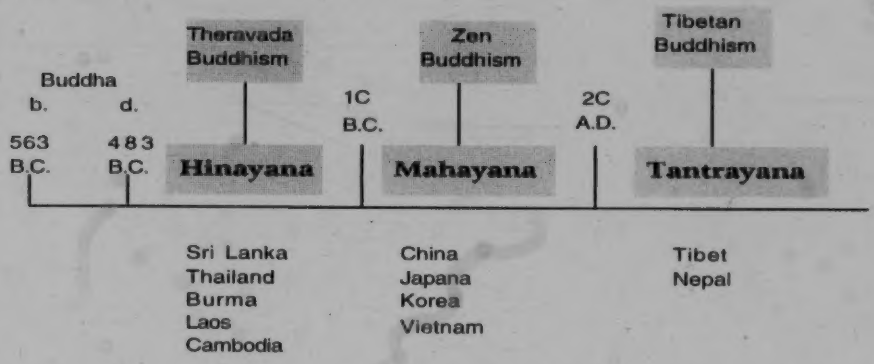
Theravada Buddhism
Zen Buddhism
Tibetan Buddhism
Buddha
b.
d.
563 B.C.
483 B.C.
1C B.C.
2C A.D.
Hinayana
Mahayana
Tantrayana
Sri Lanka
Thailand
Burma
Laos
Cambodia
China
Japana
Korea
Vietnam
Tibet
Nepal

Figure 7. *The Three Major Schools of Buddhism (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Tantrayana*. Below each school is a list of Asian countries associated with it; above each school is the most common representative of each school in the West, i.e. Theravada Buddhism is not the only branch of the Hinayana school.